



WOLVES AND HUMANS

CONSERVATION AND CO-EXISTENCE

The Newsletter of The Wolves and Humans Foundation

No. 1, 2005

Wolves and Humans - resolving conflict with carnivores

Wolves and Humans is a new charity for the twenty-first century, working with people and communities to provide positive solutions to the problems associated with living alongside wolves and other large carnivores. After centuries of persecution, attitudes began to change in the 1970s and efforts began to halt the decline of what was once the most wide-ranging land mammal on the planet. Wolf recovery is now a reality in many countries where they were exterminated in the last century, and Wolves and Humans is a response to a new conservation challenge – coexistence with these and other large carnivores in areas where livestock husbandry and human activity overlap with wolf, bear and lynx habitats.

Depredation on livestock is a major problem for rural communities where wolves have returned. Wolves and Humans will work with local communities, shepherds and livestock owners in Europe, providing resources, education and training in methods of protecting livestock and preventing attacks by predators, including livestock guarding dogs, electric fencing and fladry (the use of cloth strips on a line as a barrier - a traditional method of wolf hunting in some countries), as well as carrying out research into new methods of prevention.

An important factor in effective management of new and expanding wolf populations and the avoidance of conflicts with human interests is collection and dissemination of accurate information about their numbers, range and impact on wild and domestic prey species. Wolves and Humans will carry out research in these areas, working with experienced field biologists and conservationists across Europe and other parts of the world.

Education has a central role in co-existence with large carnivores, and Wolves and Humans will work with educators to give lectures and workshops for adults and children in countries where wolves exist or are returning. A travelling exhibition about wolves and large carnivores will be

created to educate the public about these predators, and an education pack will be produced for schools, this will be translated into a number of languages for international distribution - education is most needed where wolves are already present or are likely to return soon.

The work of Wolves and Humans will advance the long-term conservation of these protected species and the natural environment in which they live, for the benefit of the general public and future generations as promoted by Article 2 of the 1992 European Community Habitats Directive and Article 3 of the Bern Convention; and in line with the aim of the Council of Europe's Action Plan for the Conservation of Wolves in Europe ; "To maintain and restore, *in co-existence with people*, viable populations of large carnivores as an integral part of ecosystems and landscapes across Europe".

The articles in this special issue of WOLVES AND HUMANS highlight the issues affecting large carnivores and human communities, and the work being carried out by the charity in partnership with three projects in Poland, the Slovak Republic and central European Russia. It is hoped these projects will become models for coexistence with predators in a human dominated landscape, and the work of the charity will extend to other countries where large carnivores come into conflict with people.

Funds to pay for this work will be raised from subscriptions, sponsorship, donations, legacies and grants. For further information about making a donation to Wolves and Humans, please contact the Wolves and Humans office, contact details are on the back page.



Rob Howie Smith

Conservation and management of wolves in Poland

Poland is one of the largest countries in central Europe, covering 312,685 km² (121,720 square miles), and is home to almost 40 million people. Large wood complexes of pine, spruce, mixed and deciduous (consisting of beech, hornbeam, birch, oak, lime, maple) forests, rich in native species of flora and fauna, cover about 28% of the country. Nearly 90% of forests are on public land and are managed by the State Forest Service. There is a wide diversity of wildlife in these forests with around 90 species of mammal and 420 species of birds. The ungulate community consists mainly of four native species: red deer, roe deer, wild boar and moose. In a few places small isolated free-ranging populations of European bison still exist. The population of three main ungulate species has increased significantly during the last forty years and in 2000 reached an estimated level of 117,500 red deer, 597,000 roe deer, 180,300 wild boar (the moose population is still small, about 2,000 individuals and declining) in the whole of Poland. Ungulates cause large-scale damage to young tree plantations and thickets and the cost of prevention activities in the State Forests has exceeded £12 million.

Such circumstances create ideal conditions for the large predators present. The large carnivore community includes the wolf, the lynx and the brown bear. All these species are protected in the whole country, the brown bear since 1957, the lynx since 1995, and the wolf since 1998. The only region inhabited by brown bear is the Carpathian mountains (south east and south central Poland), where no more than 80 individuals occur. They are

part of a larger population spread along the Carpathian mountain range. Lynx is not a common species in Poland. Its distribution is limited to north-eastern and, eastern part of Poland and the Carpathian mountains. According to recent census studies, the number of lynx is surprisingly low, about 180 individuals.

The wolf is relatively more widespread in Poland than brown bear and lynx. According to official data the wolf population in Poland is currently estimated at 750 individuals. This carnivore is mainly found in the eastern part of the country, east of the river Vistula. Isolated populations also exist in parts of the west of Poland, such as the Nadnotecka forest. The main wolf refuge in Poland is in the Carpathian mountains. In this region, wolf populations are officially estimated at almost 380 animals. The highest numbers are found in the Bieszczady mountains. The other main wolf areas are the large forest complexes of north-eastern Poland (Białowieża Primeval Forest, Augustowska Forest, Knyszyńska Forest, Piska Forest), where about 160-190 wolves occur, although some of these have territories shared with Belarus and Russia.

In spite of strict protection of the species in Poland, a dramatic decrease in wolf numbers in western Poland has been recorded during the last decade (from about 40 individuals to just 13). This suggests a lack of dispersing wolves to replenish these small isolated populations with new individuals. An important traditional wolf migration route passes along the southern border of Poland, across the Carpathians and Sudety Mountains to Bavaria. Another route leads from the Białowieża Primeval Forest across the centre of Poland to the west. The lack of dispersing wolves could be a result of the breaking of old migration routes by the rapid development of motor traffic and motorways during the last fifteen years in Poland. Survey results suggest that not all suitable forest complexes in eastern, northern and southern parts of Poland are inhabited by wolves and the densities may not be high enough to promote the long migration of young individuals to the west. Also the migration routes through wide, deep rivers like the Vistula may be limited to cold winters when the river is covered by thick ice.

Neighbouring countries, which share the same wolf population with Poland, although being signatories to the Bern Convention, have not fully implemented legislation protecting wolves. Wolves are killed as a game species in the Slovak Republic, and are regularly persecuted in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. Wolf killing causes instability in trans-border wolf populations in the Carpathian mountains and in the eastern part of Poland. In the last few years in spite of legal protection in the

the current range of wolf population in Poland



Czech Republic and Germany, where there are only small, recently established populations of wolves, several dispersing wolves from Poland have been shot by hunters.

Wolves prey on livestock in almost the whole range of their distribution in Poland. Some packs more frequently, some incidentally. The level of damages depends on local densities of wild predators, areas inhabited by packs and prevention methods used by farmers. Most of the damage occurs in areas with free-ranging sheep flocks breeding on forested hills or on pastures where cows or cattle graze for a few days without supervision. Every year the distribution of damages across the country changes, and varies between £24,000 - £27,000. According to Polish law, losses are compensated by the State, but the system of estimating damages and the payment procedure needs to be improved. Despite compensation payments, wolf predation on livestock causes farmers to call for the return of wolf hunting, or at least the removal of wolf packs from neighbouring areas. This is strongly supported by hunters, who still see wolf predation on wild ungulates as a similar kind of loss, and represent an influential force of 100,000 members of the Polish Hunting Union. Illegal poaching of wolves is an increasing problem, particularly for small isolated populations.



Sabina Nowak

There is also conflict between wolves and human activity in managed forests. According to the current model of forest management in Poland, forestry work such as weed cutting, thinning of thickets, tree clearance and logging lasts throughout the year, and disturbs wolves during the denning season, which can affect pup survival. The traditional annual mushroom gathering season is limited to the late summer and early autumn months of the mushroom crop, but forces wolves to frequently change resting places with pups, and this can also influence rearing success.

The answer to these problems does not lie solely in prohibitive legislation and establishing special isolated protected areas for wolves. It is important

to allow wolves to inhabit all suitable managed forests and to promote conditions where the presence of these predators is accepted amongst local communities, mainly farmers, foresters and hunters. This is the reason why widespread education and intensive monitoring as well as resolving conflicts between man/wolf are fundamental to work for the long-term benefit of wolf populations and human communities in Poland.



Sabina Nowak

Since 1996 biologists Sabina Nowak and Robert Mysłajek have carried out research in the Beskidy Mountains of southern Poland, studying wolf ecology and monitoring wolf movements with particular reference to migration from Poland to other European countries. The results of the research can be used to accurately determine the number of wolves in Poland and to devise a wolf management plan for Poland. Wolves & Humans will sponsor continuation of this research, the interim results of which have already been presented at international conferences in the UK and Canada, and published in Polish and English. This project includes a wide range of educational activities including:

- Lectures, talks, posters and brochures for schoolchildren, students and local communities on the role of predators in forest ecosystems.
- Education about predators through close co-operation with TV programmes, radio and press journalists
- Wolf workshops and seminars for foresters, hunters, livestock owners, nature protection department officials from Poland, the Ukraine, Germany, Slovakia and the Czech Republic
- Specialist workshops for staff of Nature Protection Departments, foresters, hunters

and veterinarians from areas with wolves, including identification methods and determining causes of damages to livestock

Wolves & Humans will facilitate future educational activities, both in Poland and abroad.

The project provides education and training to farmers in options of preventing livestock losses to wolves, including *fladry*, electric fencing and livestock guarding dogs. Equipment and dogs are provided and full training is given to owners and shepherds in effective use. Monitoring is carried out to study the effectiveness of these methods in different situations. The results will be published and used to help prevent livestock losses in other areas where predators are a problem. Wolves and Humans will provide equipment and pay for training, and present the results of monitoring and research at conferences.

Association for Nature "WOLF" have also established a field centre in the study area in the Beskidy Mountains, to be used as an education and research centre. The centre will provide opportunities for work experience for college and university students from around the world, with training in field skills and ecology being provided, as well as being a base for the activities listed above.

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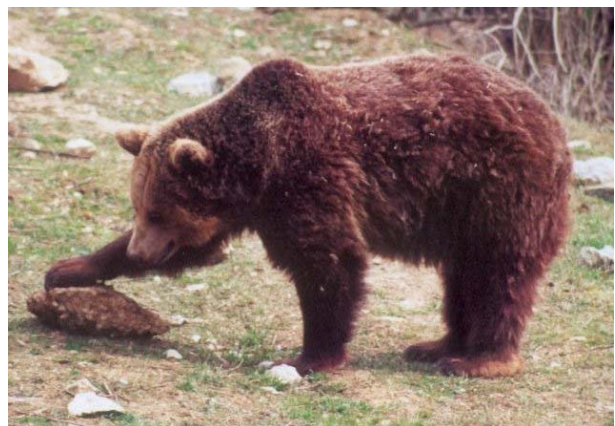
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Predators in Slovakia - science, politics and tradition in conflict

Hunters in Slovakia have this year asked the Ministry of the Environment for approval for the killing of up to 124 brown bears (out of an estimated population of 600-800), renewing controversy over hunting of predators in Slovakia. Both wolves and bears are protected under the Bern Convention and the European Wildlife and Habitats Directive (although Slovakia has a reservation under the Bern Convention, allowing hunting of these species on the basis that "*the present level of their population in the Slovak Republic permits the regulation of their numbers without detriment to their survival and to the functions of these species in the natural environment*"), but both are still legally hunted.

Bears can be hunted all year round, under two sets of rules; removal of problem animals that cause excessive damage to livestock or crops and/or are considered dangerous to humans; and 'regulation shooting', a population control measure aimed at removing around 10% of the population each year. Bears were protected in Slovakia in the 1930s after trophy hunting drove them almost to extinction, numbers subsequently recovered to the extent that hunting was reinstated in 1962 and in the past forty years more than 1,300 bears have been killed, although since 1994, the quota of 10% has not been met, sometimes falling short by as much as 50%. The bear population continued to increase, despite annual culling, until recent years, and there is evidence now that bears have reached their carrying capacity – that is, numbers are now chiefly limited by habitat and food availability. This 'regulation shooting' of bears is strongly opposed by environmental groups such as WOLF Forest Protection Movement, who see it as a concession to commercial sport hunting of the species.



Robin Rigg

Wolves can be hunted from 1st November to 15th

January without limits. In 2003, 113 wolves were killed, and an estimated 2,800 wolves have been killed since the 1960s, despite a temporary ban, lifted in 1998 when the current hunting season was introduced. Wolves are regularly hunted in National Parks and nature reserves. The actual number of wolves in Slovakia is disputed; hunters claim around 1,000, whilst scientists and environmental groups believe a more accurate figure is between 150-400. Whatever the true number, wolves are likely to be below their potential population level; Slovakia has the lowest density of wolves anywhere in the Carpathian range, and analysis has shown that livestock and other human-related food sources are not a significant part of wolf diet in Slovakia, suggesting that there is still ample wild prey to support more wolves.

Hunting therefore appears to be having little impact on bear numbers, but combined with human hunting pressure on prey species, may be keeping wolf populations at vulnerable levels.

So why is there so much controversy over predators? Hunters are pressing for even more freedom to kill wolves and bears to limit what they see as unchecked and unsustainable population growth, while environmental organisations are campaigning ever more vigorously for full year round protection, with the possible exception of 'nuisance' animals causing damage to crops and livestock.

The pro-hunting lobby's main grievance is that wolves, and to a lesser extent bears, compete with hunters for valuable game – red deer and wild boar. There have even been calls for hunters to be compensated for game killed by wolves! There is a widespread belief that without control, wolf numbers would increase indefinitely and cause even more damage to game. Wolf/prey studies have however shown that wolf numbers do not necessarily limit numbers of deer or wild boar, but that numbers of prey may have an effect on wolf numbers – for example, in Poland, after wolves were fully protected, their numbers declined. This is believed to be due to a reduction in red deer numbers caused by human hunters.

Livestock predation is sometimes cited as proof that wolves must be overpopulated, as they can no longer find enough wild prey. Research shows that livestock is actually a very minor part of wolf diet, so this seems unlikely, and in any case, the relatively minor impact on the farming economy does not appear to justify the vitriol directed at the wolf by its detractors. Bears are not a significant predator on livestock, but can cause extensive damage to agricultural crops, such as oats and

maize, as well as apples, and also beehives. Some conflict is also caused by human gathering of wild berry crops, which are an important source of food for bears. As bears appear to be at the limit of what their natural habitat can sustain, this may become an increasing problem. Bears that become dependent on crops are, or become a threat to humans are, under current rules, permitted to be shot.



Richard Morley

The difference between the attitudes of hunters to competition for game and instances of livestock depredation, and the actual situation according to scientific research, shows that the perceived threat posed by wolves and bears is a far greater problem than actual damage caused by these predators. In addition to the biological carrying capacity, there appears also to be a 'cultural' carrying capacity - that is, the number of animals that people are willing to tolerate. This is a very flexible concept and depends on levels of knowledge and awareness about carnivores, and can vary widely between social groups. It can also change very quickly in response to increased provision of information. Human dimensions research has shown that there is support for wildlife and the idea of hunting being banned in National Parks; however, this has been consistently obstructed by forestry and agricultural companies, hunting organisations and developers. Many people are poorly educated about their native wildlife, and do not have the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions and challenge this obstruction.

As in other European countries, a commission has been appointed in Slovakia to draft management plans for wolves in Slovakia, in compliance with the recommendations of The Action Plan for the conservation of wolves in Europe, drafted after a series of meetings of Council of Europe member states as part of the Large Carnivore Initiative For Europe. Similar Action Plans were also drafted for other large carnivores. The Action Plan for wolves suggests that some hunting may be acceptable as

part of a conservation and management plan, provided it forms part of a “*biologically sound harvest scheme*” and that there is a clear goal in terms of population size. The current unlimited bag for wolves clearly does not meet these requirements and some change will be necessary.

There is some contention in Slovakia that the current law on hunting bears and wolves is in contravention of the protected status of these species under the Council of Europe Directive on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna. However, Article 16 of the Directive states that providing it “*is not detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species at a favourable conservation status*”, that some exceptions can be made in the interests of protecting other wild flora and fauna or habitats, preventing damage to crops and livestock, or in the interests of public safety, or, “*for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature...*”

The concept of allowing hunting as part of a conservation initiative is clearly unacceptable to many people, and with environmental organisations lobbying for full protection of wolves and bears, the issue of management of large carnivores has become highly polarised, with the hunting advocates and the full protection advocates unwilling to compromise, and as a result very little progress is being made towards an acceptable management strategy. In purely scientific terms, there should be no objection to the concept of sacrificing individuals to preserve species at viable levels, but the polarisation of views that has occurred in Slovakia highlights the fact that conservation has become as much a socio-political issue as a scientific one, with public opinion an important factor in policy making.

It is often people’s perception of the situation that inflames passions, and not the facts; it is these perceptions that conservationists need to address. Education is a useful tool, but educators need to understand the cultural and social backgrounds that give rise to different perspectives and work within that framework, rather than bombarding the public with hard facts and figures. The stand-off between the hunting lobby and the protectionists is a good example of opposing sides making no effort to understand each other, and conservationists must attempt to play the role of mediator between such factions – management of human dimensions is as important as management of wildlife numbers in creating an environment where carnivores can flourish.

Whereas in the second half of the twentieth century draconian measures were sometimes needed to

stop species sliding into extinction, the relatively successful recovery of many of these species has led to new conservation challenges – mostly related to human attitudes, which require a much more sensitive approach.



Robin Rigg

Wolves & Humans will work with Robin Rigg of the Slovak Wildlife Society to continue a project started in 1998 to carry out field research into methods of protecting livestock from wolves in Slovakia, most notably reviving the use of the *Slovenský Čuvač*, a traditional breed of guarding dog. Dogs are provided to livestock owners in areas where depredation has occurred or is likely to occur, and training is given to shepherds on the proper raising of the dogs. They are then monitored to establish effectiveness and suitability. Education and training in the methods being researched is also available to National Park staff, dog breeders and students. The project includes research to determine the level of depredation by wolves and bears on livestock in Slovakia and its economic impact. Results so far have been published in Slovakia and presented at conferences in the UK, Canada and the USA.

A new project will seek to produce the first accurate census of wolves and wolf packs in Slovakia to provide a scientific basis for future wolf management, and identify areas of potential conflict.

Wolves and Humans would like to thank Robin Rigg of the Slovak Wildlife Society for access to his unpublished Masters thesis during preparation of this article.

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Wolves in Russia - a proactive approach

For centuries, Russia's wolves have been vilified, hunted and persecuted. Yet there are more wolves in Russia than in almost any other region of the world. An estimated 40,000 wolves currently inhabit the country. Only Canada, with an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 wolves, has more. Wolf populations in Russia have fluctuated widely during the 20th century. The rise and fall in their numbers reflects their persecution by humans. Only during wars and civil disasters, when people were otherwise occupied, has the persecution let up and wolf numbers risen.

By the early 1970s there were less than 20,000 wolves left, but in the mid-1970s, wolf numbers began growing again, probably due to two factors: greater numbers of ungulates, upon which wolves feed, and a national countryside reorganisation programme that closed many small villages. Fewer people in forested areas meant less hunting of wolves.

Currently, wolves have the same status that they did in Soviet times; the wolf is considered a harmful animal that needs to be hunted year round by all effective means. Although a federally funded bounty system no longer exists, many local hunting associations and even some federally funded regional conservation agencies provide special incentives to encourage the hunting of wolves.



CNFR Wolf Project

Why is there such antipathy towards wolves? One of the main reasons is competition with human interests; many people believe that wild ungulates such as deer, moose and wild boar are the sole property of humans and wolves that prey on them should be eliminated accordingly. The wolf's status as a trophy animal also drives hunters to kill them to show their skill and status. Livestock depredation is also a major factor. A single attack on livestock will be remembered for decades and the wolf responsible (and probably others) hunted and killed. Attacks on livestock do happen and their occurrence cannot be ignored. As there is no compensation system in Russia, no complete country-

wide data exists of the frequency although the Russian State Game Department estimated costs at \$1.6m in 2002. Fear of the spread of rabies is another motivation for elimination of wolves. According to data from the Tver region Sanitary Inspectorate of Epidemics, of the 370 registered cases of people falling ill with rabies during the last 10 years, three were caused by wolves.



Vladimir Bologov

Not everyone has such negative attitudes towards wolves; some local people live with the knowledge that they share their space with wolves and accept this, their tracks around the village being the only clue to their presence. The perceptions of the Russian people are not necessarily separated into categories of young or old, city or country, hunter or not. The reasons behind opinions must be considered; the local farmer will fear the wolf if his entire livelihood depends on his sheep. The hunter will detest the wolf that remains elusive to his gun. In towns and cities many people may like wolves, be purely disinterested or not even know of their existence in Russia. Children may simply inherit their parents' attitudes. It is therefore only education that will begin the shift of attitude from big bad wolf to animal with conservation status.

What is the future of the wolf in Russia? The country has gone through extreme political changes in the last century, and wolves and other large carnivores have been a low priority. Recent socio-economic changes within Russia have ensured that a select few of the population now hold massive wealth. Land is now available for long-term rent; once leased, what is done with it is not questioned. This can have implications for the wolf. Wolf haters can employ rangers to patrol their land and kill every wolf, paying huge private bounties out of inexhaustible funds. Wolf lovers can offer sanctuary. Whilst on a national level wolf numbers are currently stable, this may change in the future if attitudes towards these predators do not change and positive solutions to conflicts are not offered.

Biologist Vladimir Bologov works on the Central

Forest Nature Reserve Wolf Project, founded by his father Victor. The project started in 1973 to study the ecology of wolves and their interaction with humans in the Tver region, north-west of Moscow. The region covers an area of 84,000km² with relatively low human population density. Around 50% of the area is covered by boreal forest, with spruce, birch and pine dominating. There is snow cover from the end of November to the end of April. Fauna is typical of the southern taiga, with wolves, bears and lynx representing the large carnivores. Main prey animals are moose, wild boar, beaver and hare. The Central Forest Nature Reserve (CFNR) is in the western part of the region, about 350km west of Moscow, and comprises a strictly protected core area of 200km², with a 400km² buffer zone where only limited human activity is allowed. In 1985 the CFNR was designated a UNESCO Biosphere reserve, as one of the last places in European Russia where the southern taiga exists in its original state.

Historically, the region has had the highest wolf density in Russia, reaching as many as 11/1000km², with territory sizes ranging from 300-700km². The population has been in sharp decline in recent years, with a density of just 4 animals per 1000km² recorded in 2002. In the same year, the government of the Tver region started paying a bounty of 1000 rubles (around £21) for every wolf turned in, dead or alive. Culls in the region have averaged 390 wolves per year since 1995. Trapping, fladry, denning (taking pups from the den) and poison are commonly used.

Today, working with Wolves and Humans, the project includes studies on wolf ecology and behaviour - monitoring wolf territories and population dynamics, including a census of wolf numbers; and wolf-human interactions – research on the impact of depredation on domestic animals and measures to alleviate this.



Testing a novel method of protecting livestock

Vladimir Bologov

The drafting of a wolf management plan for the region is one of the main aims of the project. Vladi-

mir Bologov's studies have shown that the existing bounty system, which results in an annual harvest of around 30% of the population, has no real effect on wolf numbers, as at this level of persecution wolves adapt their reproduction rate to meet hunting pressure. The control of the use of poison (usually fluorine acetate barium) is proposed, as it threatens not only wolves but also other wildlife, including rare white-tailed and golden eagles. In addition to this, the management plan will contain recommendations, based on sound research, on a closed season for wolf hunting, stricter controls on hunting (including targeting of problem animals), compensation for livestock losses, and introduction of preventative measures to protect livestock.

Education also plays a key part in the project, as the public in Russia still regards the wolf as a dangerous predator. To this end a summer 'eco-school' was started in 1995, to teach children about nature and wolves, further educational activities are planned for the future, with information on wolf ecology and behaviour being made freely available.

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