

The magazine of The UK Wolf Conservation Trust, published quarterly

WolfPrint

Issue 29 Winter 2006/07



WolfPrint

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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 - £2.50

4 issues - £14.00 incl P&P

Overseas subscriptions - £10.00 PLUS P&P. Please contact the UKWCT for overseas postage costs.

Online subscription £10.00 - PDF download only. Please visit www.ukwolf.org

E ditorial



I am always greatly encouraged and inspired by the work of conservationists throughout the world, many of whom are unsung heroes, quietly going about their business carrying out much-needed research, and developing education programmes to help conserve wild species and habitats. In this issue, we report on two projects in Poland and Russia that are run by such people. Dedicated and hugely resourceful, these people are the front end of wolf conservation. I hope you enjoy reading about the work they do.

Wolves have, for centuries, tapped deep into the human psyche. There is no other species with which we identify so readily on the one hand, and yet vilify so vociferously on the other. The wolf has a strong place in the hearts and minds of many people, whether hated and feared, or loved and revered. Stories abound in every country where wolves were once, or still are present. In *Ants of the Ancient Land*, Robin Herne gives us an insight into ancient myth and legend of wolves in Ireland, and how the symbol of the wolf manifested itself into the everyday lives of the people.

I am pleased to report that we have a new member of the Wolf Print team. Brian James answered an advertisement I circulated to UKWCT volunteers, and joined the team just as we were putting this issue together. Brian brings with him some excellent experience working on other magazines, and has been an active volunteer at the Trust for some time.

We are planning to move Wolf Print forward in leaps and bounds in 2007 by increasing its circulation both in print form and online. Our international links continue to grow stronger, which in turn provides us with information and news from the "coal-face" of wolf conservation. Education will also be high on the agenda next year. The UKWCT has made some great strides forward in this area with the refurbishment of the Education Centre, and partnerships being formed with veterinary and agricultural colleges with a view to creating an international student exchange programme. We will bring you regular updates on our progress.

As 2006 draws to a close, we would like to thank you, our readers, for your continued support, and wish you and your kith and kin our very best wishes for the festive season.

DTaylor

You can help to support wild wolves directly by making a donation to projects in Europe:

The UKWCT currently supports three projects on a long term basis:

Balkani Wildlife Society, Bulgaria

Chisty Les Biological Station, Russia

Wolf Conservation and Research Project, Croatia

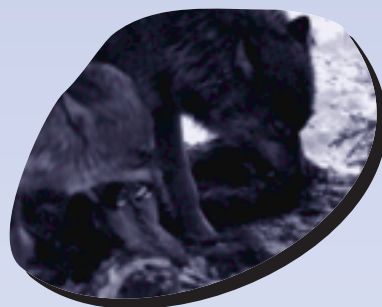
The UKWCT will be making donations of £3,500 each to Russia and Bulgaria in December 2006, and a donation of £2,000 to Croatia in January 2007.

If you would like to make a donation that will go directly to these projects, then please send this to the UK Wolf Conservation Trust, Butlers Farm, Beenham, Reading RG7 5NT. Please state clearly which project you would like your donation to go to.

PICTURE CREDITS: Front Cover and pgs 15-18 - Chisty Les, Biological Station, Russia
Inside Back Cover - Chis Senior



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



Inside this issue...



Wolves of the World



Stobnica – Enchanted Sanctuary and the very first Polish Wolf Park in the making



Ants of the Ancient Land



Helping to Keep Wolves in the Wild
The Sharp End of Wolf Conservation



WOLVES

of the

WORLD ...

AFRICA

Vaccine hopes for Ethiopian wolf

Scientists hope their findings will help secure the wolves' future.

A programme of targeted vaccinations could help prevent the spread of rabies among the world's rarest dog, the Ethiopian wolf, scientists suggest.

A team of UK researchers found that targeted reactive measures were more effective than "blanket" vaccination.

As few as 500 of the wolves are left in the wild after an outbreak of the infectious disease in the 1990s wiped out three-quarters of the population.

The findings were presented in the science journal *Nature*.

The scientists showed that by vaccinating just 30% of the wolves, they were able to reduce the spread of rabies during an outbreak, thereby reducing the number of animals killed by the disease.

Extinction fears

Lead author Dan Haydon, from the University of Glasgow, said: "Theoreticians have devoted a lot of effort to working out how to vaccinate populations in ways that prevent epidemics getting started, but this requires coverage that is impractical in wild populations."

Ethiopian wolves (*Canis simensis*) are only found in remote areas of the Bale Mountains, located in the south of the African nation.

"We've looked at vaccination studies that don't prevent all outbreaks, but do reduce the chances of really big outbreaks - one that could push an endangered population over the extinction threshold," Dr Haydon said.

"These strategies turn out to be effective and a lot more practical," he added.

The researchers used modelling to show that even if fewer wolves were vaccinated, a targeted response to an outbreak of rabies would still virtually eliminate the risk of the animals becoming extinct.

They suggested that regular monitoring would allow early detection and a rapid response.

Dr Claudio Sillero-Zubiri, from Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU), hoped the findings would help ensure the long-term survival of the wolves.

"Diseases such as rabies and distemper, transmitted from domestic dogs, pose the most immediate threat," he said.

"Targeted vaccination intervention presents a useful tool to protect the remaining wolf populations from extinction."

Source:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/6040510.stm>

EUROPE

England

New Research published on the Domestication of Dogs

A long running partnership begins...

According to a recent genetic study conducted by Peter Savolainen of the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden, and colleagues, the true domestic dog probably originated 15,000 years ago - and in just one location (possibly from only three female wolves) in East Asia.

The Natufian hunters and gatherers of the Mediterranean region of the Levant offer us the earliest reliably dated evidence of people living with domesticated dogs. A 12,000-year-old grave at Ain Mallah in present-day northern Israel contains an oldish man cradling a young dog with his left hand.

By 10,000 years ago, dogs seem to have been almost everywhere: a rock painting in Iraq shows people hunting deer alongside dogs with curly tails; in Algeria, dogs along with spear-carrying human, are depicted surrounding a bovine creature. However, they were not in sub-Saharan Africa until around 500AD, suggesting that people hadn't been back to Africa since they were domesticated - for already, it seems, man and dog were inseparable.

Source:

Reported in *Geographical* magazine, November 2006

Call of the wild:

Re-establishing our lost wild animals

Britain was once home to ferocious creatures such as wolves, bears and wild boar. Peter Marren meets the activists who plan to bring them back

If Peter Clarke had his way, the countryside would be a fiercer, more romantic place. There would be wolves in the hills and lynx in the forests. Rivers would be home to the long-lost British sturgeon, while beavers would build their dams in the headwaters. Maybe the odd walrus would be lying up on an offshore island.

Clarke, a former environment policy adviser to the Thatcher government, is spokesman for a shadowy group called the Wild Beasts Trust. The trust attracted attention recently when Clarke let slip that it was holding six lynxes and two wolves which it planned to release in Scotland. Nothing more has been heard of the release, but the trust reflects a broadly-felt frustration with the lack of progress in re-establishing our lost wild animals.

Britain and Ireland have turned their backs on the rehabilitation of our extinct big beasts. The

beaver, lynx, wild boar and wolf are not prehistoric. All are now known to have lived in Britain until early modern times. Many would love to see their return. But the Government, bowing to the landowning lobby, is adamantly opposed. Last year, the Scottish Executive turned down a detailed proposal to release beavers in western Scotland. Yet other EU countries have successfully re-established beavers, lynxes, wolves and even bears.

Clarke points out the contradiction between release of big wild birds and the non-release of big wild mammals. With six million birdwatchers in support, the Government has countenanced the release of red kites all over Britain, and is considering releasing giant sea eagles. But the beaver, it seems, is a beast too far.

For some, the attraction of a land with beavers and other once indigenous large animals goes well beyond ecology. "The soul of a location is changed by the presence of these long-extinct species," says Clarke. "A wolf howling on a moonlit night transforms the poetry of a glen."

Source:

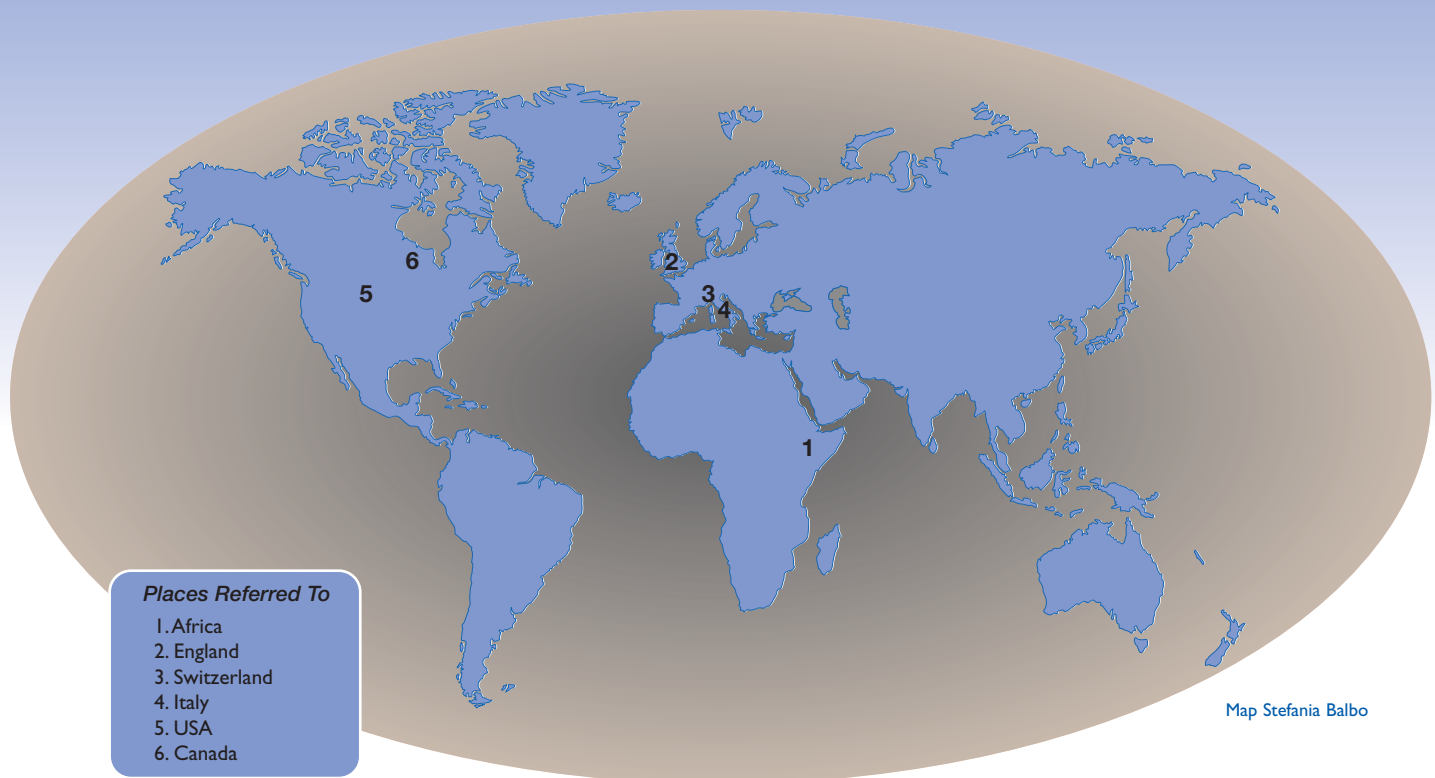
The Independent, 09 November 2006

Italy

Italy claims Swiss are killing protected wolves

ROME - Italy this month called on its European neighbours to put a halt to the "extermination" of wolves, which it claims is putting at risk decades of effort in bringing the beautiful but ferocious mammal back to the wild.

Despite theoretical protection under EU law, wild wolves continue to be targeted in Europe; the most recent kill was in Goms, Switzerland, at the end of October.



According to Italian conservationists, "decades of conservation work" are now at risk from the hunters, who despite the legislation do not hesitate to shoot wolves dead on sight.

At a meeting of the Convention of the Alps in Austria, Italy prepared to take up the cudgels on behalf of the predator.

After disappearing from most of Europe early in the 20th century, wolves have gradually returned in small numbers and are found now in most parts of the Italian peninsula and in France, Switzerland and Germany.

The species is protected by the Bern Convention of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, of which all EU members are signatories.

But this has not deterred hunters and farmers in France and Germany from attempting to wipe out the hated sheep-lifter all over again.

It is a repeat of the fate that befell Bruno the bear, whose unhappy story made news day after day in the summer.

The brown bear happily and safely resident in Italy made the mistake of straying across the border into Bavaria, where it was shot by a hunter, despite its status as a species theoretically protected across the EU.

"In Italy the wolves must be protected," commented Italy's environment minister, Alfonso Pecoraro Scanio, who also heads the Green Party.

"In France and Switzerland on the other hand they are massacred. The situation is unsustainable. I have already raised the issue at the Council of European Ministers and with Stavros Dimas, the EU's Environmental Commissioner, who has taken on the task of drafting a directive for the protection of the species across borders.

"We have got to get out of this surreal situation as quickly as possible," the minister went on.

"The EU finances the protection of the wolf and the EU member states kill them. This is no good. We don't accept a repetition of the Bruno saga, the bear which Italy succeeded in protecting but which, as soon as it set foot in Bavaria, was shot."

The appeal to the minister to do his bit to save wolves straying across Europe's borders was launched by Legambiente, Italy's largest environmental organisation.

"One can't protect them by day and kill them by night," said Damiano di Simine, head of the organisation's Alpine observatory.

"In Bavaria no bear had been seen in more than a century and the first to arrive was riddled with shot. With chronometrical precision Switzerland does away with all wolves, and is charged with the killing of at least 25 wolf cubs, which amounts to a generalised licence to kill. France is proposing to eliminate six wolves."

Italy's own record is not spotless.

"We ourselves have a problem with poaching," Alberto Meriggi told La Repubblica newspaper, a researcher at the University of Pavia and an expert on the distribution of wolves in the northern Apennines.

"But our decision to apply the law protecting wolves without exception has allowed the Apennine wolf to return vigorously throughout the peninsula. The first traces were in 1986 in the province of Genoa, then three years later in the maritime Alps, in the province of Cuneo. Today once again the Italian wolf is in resurgence. We must be careful not to allow the destruction of decades of work."

Source:

By Peter Popham

http://www.nzherald.co.nz/section/story.cfm?c_id=2&ObjectID=10409749

Switzerland

Shooting permit delivered for two wolves

During last July and August, 32 sheep were killed in the Goms Valley, which is in the eastern part of the canton Valais. Genetic analyses showed that it was a wolf originating from the French-Italian alpine population that was responsible for these depredations.

According to the Swiss Wolf Management Plan (SWMP), a shooting permit to remove this individual was delivered for 60 days because more than 25 sheep were killed within four weeks. Eventually, a female wolf was shot by the local gamekeepers at the end of October; two weeks before the permit came to an end.

Almost the same scenario occurred a few weeks later in the Chablais, in the western part of the canton Valais. Thirty-one sheep were killed by an "Italian" wolf within eight days. Having once again exceeded the critical limit, a permit to shoot this individual was given by local authorities. So far, the wolf has been able to escape his fate.

At the time of going to press, it is estimated that six to ten wolves could be present in Switzerland, and to date there have been no signs of reproduction.

Source:

Report from Jean-Marc Weber



NORTH AMERICA

Canada

When a wolf strikes, it's no picnic - Holiday weekend ends in chaos as animal attacks families at Northern Ontario beach

Brenda Wright says she and her two children had just eaten their turkey sandwiches and settled onto their beach towels when the horror began.

Her son, Casey, 12, noticed a black, dog-like animal running across the Northern Ontario beach where the family was enjoying the last day of summer vacation.

In a sudden and unrelenting attack, the animal ripped into Casey's buttock, tore his mother's hands and leg, and bloodied his 14-year-old sister's scalp, lunging after the family of six as they fled screaming into Lake Superior.

"I was trying to fight him off and he grabbed my finger. I thought he pulled it off....Honest to God, it looks like hamburger meat," Ms. Wright said yesterday from her mother's home in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.

Ms. Wright's family was not the only one to face the 33-kilogram wolf. The attacks Monday by one *Canis lupus* ended with the animal dead and six people, including a three-year-old girl, bloodied, torn and terrified.

For Jerry and Rachel Talbot, it started at around 4 p.m. The Wawa, Ont., couple, on their way to a wedding in Sudbury with granddaughters Leah, 3, and Madison, 5, pulled off of Highway 17 for a quick swim at a popular day picnic area in Lake Superior Provincial Park.

According to park staff, more than a dozen others were enjoying the end of the Labour Day weekend at Katherine's Cove when the Talbot family wandered onto the beach and began to remove their shoes.

Mr. Talbot noticed a black animal chasing a girl across the sand. Too slow for the girl, the animal veered off and grabbed a slower, smaller target: Leah.

It clamped its jaws around the blond toddler's left upper arm and began dragging her away from her grandmother and sister, said Leah's mother, Josee Morgan, who told the story yesterday from Marathon, Ont. The girl was dragged about six metres before the wolf dropped her on her back, startled by the shrieks of

her grandparents and those who had jumped in to help.

"[Leah] started to run, but she was in sand and she was in shock and all that, that she couldn't get her feet going," Ms. Morgan said yesterday.

The wolf grabbed the hood of the little girl's black jacket. This time, Ms. Talbot's advances and screams caused the wolf to drop the girl momentarily and Ms. Talbot lunged forward, scooped up the child and raced to her vehicle. Mr. Talbot and Madison were close behind.

The attack on the Wright family occurred on Bathtub Island, a large rocky area within wading distance of the mainland and about 100 metres south of Katherine's Cove.

Ms. Wright, on a day trip with her sister-in-law, two children and their cousins, aged 10 and 13, said her family was probably attacked first. (Park officials say they aren't sure about the order of the attacks.)

She said the animal nipped the ankle of her 13-year-old nephew, Jake, then clamped down on her son's buttock, carrying him about half a metre before dropping him and lunging at her.

The wolf's teeth tore into her hands and her leg as she fought back and the group raced into the shallow swimming area. Ms. Wright said the wolf followed them, this time going after Emily Wright, 14.

"[Emily] was a real fighter. . . . She got mostly claws in her head and her arm," her mother said.

Alerted by the screams, two strangers raced over and managed to scare off the wolf. As families hid in the trees, the wolf returned minutes later and rifled through their picnic stashes, Ms. Wright said.

Park superintendent Bill Elliott, a 17-year veteran of the park and seasoned hunter, was alerted by two other visitors who rushed over from Bathtub Island.

He said a woman was bitten in a third incident Monday.

At about 6:30 p.m. Monday, Mr. Elliott shot the wolf twice on Highway 17, about a kilometre north of where Leah had been attacked.

The wolf's head has been sent to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in Ottawa, where it will be tested for rabies. Mr. Elliott said that the young, full-grown male was limping, possibly from an older injury caused by a vehicle.

Brent Patterson, a scientist with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, said that wolves, who generally travel in packs and who prey on moose and beavers in Ontario, rarely attack or even show themselves to humans.

"It is abnormal behaviour for a wolf to be fearless," he said. Wolves who attack people are usually sick or injured, he said.

According to the ministry, there have been few instances in Canada where wolves have bitten people; no one has ever been killed by a wolf attack in North America.

Yesterday, Leah was recovering with her family in Wawa. She belted out *You Are My Sunshine* in hospital after getting 15 butterfly clips in her arm and told a local reporter: "When I was on the beach going to the water, a wolf bit my arm, and then I cried."

The attack hasn't fazed her, her mother said. "She's smiling. She knows something happened, though, because she'll often say 'I love you, I love you.'"

As for Ms. Wright and her children, who all have stitches and various puncture wounds, the shock has not worn off.

"You continue to see this wolf's face and you relive it. . . . I think it's going to take some time," Ms. Wright said.

Source:

By Hayley Mick

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/LAC.20060906.WOLF06/TPStory/TPNational/Ontario/>

USA

'We know that wolves can live with people'

PAUL SMITHS — Nearly a dozen people received a crash course on wolves Thursday morning at the student center at Paul Smith's College.

Sponsored by the Coalition to Restore the Eastern Wolf, the intention of the event was to educate its attendees about wolves, extirpated from the Adirondacks in the 1890s, so they could share what they learned with the public.

The hope among some wolf advocates is the once-native animal will make a recovery here. By educating people on the wolf, people like CREW Coordinator Nadia Steinzor said she hopes the animal, if it ever returns, would be more readily accepted than in the past, when residents killed them

out of fear, for pelts or for bounties.

"We know that wolves can live with people," said Peggy Struhsacker, wolf project coordinator with the National Wildlife Federation, "but people can't live with wolves."

Struhsacker was one of two speakers. Steinzor was the other. Throughout the morning, the two outlined numerous reasons why the wolf would play an important role here or anywhere in the Northeast.

Among the reasons was that the animal was native here and played an important role in the ecosystem as a "keystone species."

"Why we need an apex predator is the resistance it gives to an ecosystem," Struhsacker said.

The presence of wolves can indirectly benefit plant life and other animals, Struhsacker said, pointing out that Yellowstone National Park wildlife has benefitted from wolves.

One of handouts at the event was a November 2003 article in *National Wildlife* magazine about the benefits Yellowstone National Park has reaped from the animal.

The article details how the presence of wolves made the local coyote population decline, which helped other mid-sized predator populations such as the red fox increase. In the Adirondacks, coyotes are a non-native species, though some argument that coyotes have taken the wolves place atop the food chain.

Wolves in Yellowstone, according to the report, have also cut down on browsing by elk by displacing the elk population in areas wolves frequent. Overbrowsing by elk is blamed for negatively affecting the aspen tree population, which animals like the beaver depend upon.

Wolf advocates have said similar situations could develop in the Northeast, if wolves returned here.

During the meeting, a couple of audience members told stories about seeing wolves in the Adirondacks. But Struhsacker expressed scepticism about the reports and said there is more evidence of wolves returning to places like New Hampshire and Maine, where one was killed by a hunter in the spring. Wolves have been reportedly attempting to come down from Quebec into these states, she said.

Struhsacker said there needs to be more field work done and hard evidence in the Adirondacks.

"This type of research is really needed," she said. "I hear these stories all the time."

But Struhsacker, who spends her time in states east of New York like New Hampshire, said she realizes that state run governmental wildlife agencies don't have the resources to do field work.

"The biologists I work with mean well," she said. "They are just losing staff and money."

If there is anything that is going to happen research-wise, Struhsacker said it will have to be with money from the federal government, which currently lists the wolf as an endangered species. But they won't take action until there is proof of an animal population.

But she suggested that the work could also be taken on by universities.

"I always say graduate students should be working on this," Struhsacker said.

Among those present at the meeting were several members of the Adirondack Council.

John Davis, of the Adirondack Council, said his group would be able to best help the wolf by continuing on its current course of preserving habitat for wolves and other animals.

Similar to some of the government agencies, the Adirondack Council's time is taken up by more immediate concerns regarding issues such as development in the Adirondack Park.

The forum was the first of three that will be held in the Northeast this autumn. The others are scheduled to take place in Maine and New Hampshire.

Paul Smith's College was not affiliated with the event; it only provided space to CREW.

Source:
By Mike Lynch, Enterprise Staff Writer
<http://www.adirondackdailyenterprise.com/news/articles.asp?articleID=4330>

Conservation groups intervene in Wyoming wolf lawsuit

Cheyenne, WY: Six conservation organizations filed legal papers in Wyoming federal court today seeking to prevent unregulated poisoning, trapping, and shooting

of gray wolves across the vast majority of the species' range in Wyoming outside of Yellowstone National Park.

The State of Wyoming filed suit in October, challenging the U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service's refusal to approve Wyoming's wolf management plan and eliminate Endangered Species Act protections for the Northern Rockies population of gray wolves. The Wyoming plan proposes to classify wolves as "predators," which would legalize indiscriminate killing throughout 90% of the wolf's range in Wyoming outside of Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks.

Wyoming has requested a court order requiring the federal government to approve the Wyoming management plan and to immediately kill approximately 200 wolves in the state.

"Wyoming seeks to turn back the clock on wolf recovery," said Steve Thomas of the Wyoming Sierra Club's Sheridan office. "Wyoming's plan would reinstate wolf policies that brought wolves to the brink of extinction in the first place."

Gray wolves in Wyoming are currently protected by the Endangered Species Act. Although numbers of wolves are increasing, the Fish and Wildlife Service cannot legally "delist" wolves in the Northern Rockies until Idaho, Montana and Wyoming have laws and management plans in place that will maintain viable wolf populations. Based on Wyoming's proposal to manage wolves as "predators," the Fish and Wildlife Service has concluded that Wyoming's plan falls short. Wyoming's previous lawsuit challenging the Fish and Wildlife Service's rejection of its wolf management plan was rejected by the federal courts on procedural grounds.

Wyoming claims that the wolf population is responsible for a loss in state revenues. However, according to Louisa Willcox of the Natural Resources Defense Council, "Since wolves were reintroduced in Yellowstone over a decade ago, tourism revenues have steadily increased, in large part because wolves attract so many visitors from all over the country." Willcox adds that wolves are consistently one of the lowest causes of mortality in Wyoming livestock, well behind weather, disease, poison, and other predators.

"Wyoming's request that the court order the federal government to remove two-thirds of Wyoming's wolf population demonstrates the state's outright hostility to wolves," said Suzanne Asha Stone, northern Rockies representative for Defenders of Wildlife, the conservation organization that has reimbursed Wyoming ranchers more than \$200,000 for confirmed livestock losses to wolves. "The fact is the Service would have to kill those wolves and their offspring if Wyoming's demand is granted."

Earthjustice is representing Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council,

Defenders of Wildlife, Wyoming Outdoor Council, Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, and Biodiversity Conservation Alliance in the lawsuit.

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WYOMING WOLF LAWSUIT FACTSHEET

MYTH: Wolves are devastating Wyoming's livestock industry.

REALITY:

- In 2005, wolves killed a total of 74 cattle and 16 sheep in entire state of Wyoming. Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery 2005 Interagency Annual Report, <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/wolf/>
- Only 2% of sheep mortality statewide in 2005 is attributable to wolves. More sheep died in 2005 from poisoning (5.5%), eagles (3.3%), lambing (13.9%), weather (17.8%), disease (8.2%), and other predators (45.1%). Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, <http://www.nass.usda.gov/wy>.

MYTH: Wolves are decimating Wyoming's elk population.

REALITY: The state of Wyoming continues to manage for a reduction in Wyoming's elk population. The population is currently estimated at 93,449 elk — 10,264 more elk than the state's population objective. Source: Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Annual Report 2006 157.

MYTH: Wyoming Game & Fish revenues are dropping precipitously.

REALITY: Wyoming Department of Game & Fish revenues from sales of elk hunting licenses have steadily increased from \$6.3 million in 2001 to \$7.6 million in 2006. Source: Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Annual Report 2006 157.

MYTH: Wolves are destroying Wyoming's tourism industry.

REALITY: Through 2005, total spending on Wyoming tourism, tourism revenues, and the number of people employed in the industry have all increased every year since 1997. Source: Wyoming Business Council, Wyoming Travel Industry 2005 Impact Report 2.

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.



Stobnica – Enchanted Sanctuary and the very first Polish Wolf Park in the making

Article and photos by Ewa Love

At the Gates

There is no exaggeration in saying that I was always a secret wolf enthusiast and an admirer of this marvellous species ...

It was a beautiful, late autumn morning when I first arrived at Stobnica. I drove 50 km out of Poznan, a city in western Poland, to find out about the wolves kept there. I had no idea why they were there, but what I was about to discover was not only ten beautiful European wolves, but also a group of extremely friendly, enthusiastic and knowledgeable people looking after them.

The final stretch of the journey was a 1.3 km drive through the beautiful Notecka Virgin Forest, and as I arrived at the gates, Prof. Andrzej Bereszynski and Jacek Wieckowski were just leaving for an important meeting. I had not made any prior arrangements to speak to them. However, although being in a

hurry, and perhaps due to my expressed, great interest in the wolves, I was warmly received and endowed with a large amount of written information about the Station, and the Professor's book on the wolves of Poland.

As the Professor and Jacek had to leave, I was left in the company of Zenon Madaj, who had worked at the Station for over 21 years, and as I found out, was himself a mine of information. I crossed the gates of the Research Station and my journey began ...

The History of the Research Station

Stobnica is situated in the Konczak Valley, in the Notecka Virgin Forest, and the Research Station lies by the beautiful stream, known for its crystal clear waters. The Station was founded in 1974 by Prof. Ryszard Graczyk of the Department of Zoology at Poznan University of Agriculture. The objectives of

the Station remain the same as thirty-two years ago: restitution and reintroduction of rare and endangered animals with populations threatened by extinction.

Since 1994, following Prof. Graczyk's retirement, the Station is run by Prof. Andrzej Bereszynski, present Head of the Zoology Department. The scientific activity of Prof. Bereszynski focuses mainly on the protection of rare and endangered animals; the conservation of biotopes and the natural environment. He fully participated in the earlier studies at the Station involving the declining species of bustard, and more recent studies into reinstating the bison and successful reintroduction of the European beaver to West Poland, after its absence in that region for seven centuries.

Prof. Bereszynski has devoted his recent years to the protection of the wolf, *Canis lupus*, based on his scientific studies into this species. He has put much time and effort in changing the legal status of the wolf and as a result, in April 1998, wolves were entered onto the Polish list of protected animals.

The Enchanted Sanctuary

A long path leads to the heart of the Station; the wolves' enclosures. On the day that I visited, as usual, there were other visitors too, including a large group of schoolchildren. Zenon Madaj guided them round all the animals, not just the wolves, but other species, in particular the rare breeds of birds. There is also an educational nature trail through the beautiful Konczak Valley, leading to the Polish wild ponies called *Tarpan*. The Station is running a breeding programme to reintroduce these animals into the wild in the Virgin Forest. There are also sightings of beaver activity by the nearby stream.

Stobnica plays a major role in educating society about the importance of wildlife and the protection of endangered species. It is famous for dispelling the myths surrounding the wolf's character and receives thousands of visitors throughout the year: schoolchildren, students and people from different walks of life. The Station has been



Zenon Madaj and Ewa Love at the entrance to Stobnica.



featured in various newspaper articles, TV documentaries and films but, to me, it is a sanctuary for animals that would not have survived had they not been here. Looking around one can appreciate the fantastic work that has been done in preventing these species from extinction, a gift of Nature, a tranquil place, hidden in the Virgin Forest, where the animals feel safe. This becomes so apparent when suddenly meeting a crane, wandering contentedly in the grounds. This beautiful bird came here with a broken wing and found his sanctuary. He became so accustomed to humans that he has no fear of them and now greets everyone, and follows the visitors around, occasionally chewing their shoelaces!

There are three wonderful dogs at Stobnica that belong to the Professor and Jacek: Chinook, a Canadian shepherd, Soso a Russian terrier and Watra, a mountain shepherd. It is so lovely to watch them relaxing in the autumn sun, amongst the peaceful surroundings of Stobnica.

The children have now left, the crane insists on the laces and Zenon gives up two hours of his time to tell me about the Station and its wolves.

The Wolves at Stobnica

The first wolf to arrive at Stobnica, in September 1996, was Fifty, a female from the zoo in Nowy Tomysl. Her parents were rescued as cubs from poachers who had raided a wolf's den in 1989. Fifty was born on 1st June 1996 and as the zoo was lacking in space, the three-month-old cub was sent to Stobnica, where there was a strong desire to create the very first Polish Wolf Park. She was given to Prof. Bereszynski as a gift for his 50th Birthday, hence the name Fifty.

In 1997, following the success of Fifty, another she-wolf arrived at Stobnica from the same zoo. Fairy was Fifty's younger sister who developed a severe case of epilepsy and despite extensive drug therapy, died three

years later. While at Stobnica, she took part in the epic historical movie *Ogniem i mieczem* (With Fire and Sword) and a documentary about wolves. This was possible because of the way she was socialized with humans soon after she was born.

In 1999, Prof. Bereszynski rescued two wolves from an illegal German breeder in Rudno. There were several animals there, kept in appalling conditions, badly mistreated, fed the wrong diet, and some too ill to be kept alive. The two that were saved and brought to Stobnica were Bari and Sara. Sara died fourteen months later due to her previous mistreatment, but Bari lived until sixteen years of age, and died in Stobnica of natural causes.

In the same year, Nowy Tomysl zoo gave Stobnica two ten-days-old cubs called Friend and Funny. Here, at the Research Station, they were hand-reared by Jacek Wieckowski and Aleksandra Kraszkiewicz, both zoologists and wolf enthusiasts, working alongside Prof. Bereszynski. While Funny later moved to a zoo in Cracow, Friend remained in Stobnica and now shares his enclosure with Fauna, Fifty's daughter born in Stobnica in 2000. Fauna's father, Kazan, was brought into Stobnica from a nearby farm, to breed with Fifty. Kazan stayed in Stobnica, as the conditions he was previously kept in were not ideal. He and Fifty also produced another litter of six cubs in 2001, which were hand-reared by Jacek and Aleksandra (but sadly one of these later died as a young adult). Two years ago, fifteen-year-old Kazan died of natural causes. His successor was Vicky, a male, born in 1993, who came to Stobnica in 1999 from the zoo in Bialystok. However, Fifty would not accept him, despite several attempts by the Station to unite them, finally resulting in the pair being kept in two separate enclosures.

The most recent female to join the wolves in Stobnica was five-month-old Wetlina. Her story is as sad as many of the other wolves in Poland, who are typically rescued from illegal breeders or confiscated from poachers. She was about two months old when brought to Stobnica during the night of 10th of July this year, by a friend, an artist living in Bieszczady Mountains. He managed to buy her from a trader, who had kept her chained after some poachers had raided the wolves' den. She has now spent three months in Stobnica, in a secluded and peaceful enclosure, but is still is very nervous at the sight of a human.

Currently there are ten wolves at Stobnica, kept in several enclosures: The largest one is occupied by the impressive 2001 litter: Tobos, Demos, Luna, Wenus and Pati. They are a delightful pack, photographed in Stobnica by Monty Sloan in 2003. Brought up and socialized with humans as cubs, they are now the true ambassadors of their kind, helping in dispelling negative myths and legends surrounding the wolf's character; the second largest enclosure is occupied by the aforementioned Fauna and Friend; while at the far end of the sanctuary, a quieter set of three separate enclosures houses Fifty, Vicky and Wetlina. As the breeding programme has been temporarily suspended, and because most of the wolves are closely related, all females get separated from the males during the mating season.

The wolves are fed meat that has been thoroughly vetted, and in many cases organically reared, often consisting of roadkill deer or wild boar from around the National Park. The programme of raising the wolf cubs from as young as ten days old by humans makes it possible to socialize them with the visitors to the Station, helps to ease husbandry, and reduces the stress of veterinary procedures.



Aleksandra Kraszkiewicz and Jacek Wieckowski.

The breeding programme enables the Station in Stobnica to carry out many scientific studies based on the observation of wolves in captivity. These include: behaviour of wolves in captivity and their relationship with humans; comparison in behaviour of dogs and wolves; vocal articulation in wolves kept in captivity; and research on wolves' territorialism.

In the future, the existence of the Wolf Park in Stobnica will enable further research, as the living conditions of the wolves in the Park will be almost identical to those in the wild. The use of video monitoring will provide the material for various studies, which will

contribute to understanding and preservation of the wolf population in the wild.

Different aspects of wolf protection in Poland

The population of the wolf in Poland over the last twenty years can be summarised in three distinctive stages: 1976-1984, quantitative growth; 1985-1990, stabilization on the relatively high level; 1991, gradual decrease. Currently, the wolf population in Poland is an estimated 550 individuals.

It is important to realise that the population of wolves can be restored by natural

expansion of this animal from the regions of Poland where it still exists, without the need for reintroduction. There are various aspects of wolf protection to be considered:

Migration – the importance of protecting the wolves' migratory routes through Poland from the East (Byelorussia, Ukraine, Lithuania and Russia) to the west of Europe through various, old historic corridors, joined together by the Notecka Valley. Protection of this Valley will enable wolves to wander between the various regions. It is important to note that the wolf population in the east of Poland is far greater than in the west. In addition, it is thought to be necessary to





Demos.

carry out genetic research on the wolf population. One of the most serious anthropogenic barriers restricting the wolf's migration is the motorway: It is important to build a number of underground passes to prevent inter-breeding (see *Wolves in Germany: A Gift?*, Issue 28).

Education – ecological education of society, not only of hunters and foresters, but also sheep and cattle breeders, and other farmers, should be addressed.

Reintroduction of watch dogs – reinstating the use of livestock-guarding dogs in wolf management would be highly recommendable.

Compensation – money for losses caused by wolves to farm animals should be paid to farmers and breeders according to the same principles which apply in the case of damage caused by bison, beavers and bears, as provided by the Bill of Nature in 1991.

Radiotelemetry – its widespread use helps to obtain very important data relating to wolf populations, in terms of their occurrence and migration. This method has already been used in Eastern Poland, where the numbers of wolves are significantly larger, and needs to be expanded to the western parts of the country.

Threat from poachers – despite the wolf being added to the Polish Red Book of Animals, and its legally protected status from April 1998, the illegal shooting continues.

Wolf Park – the establishment of the Wolf Park in Poland will create a unique opportunity to carry out natural observation and scientific research into this species, as well as dispelling the myths surrounding wolves, and educating society about the true nature of these animals.

The above aspects are widely addressed and elaborated upon in Prof. Bereszynski's book, "Wolf (*Canis lupus Linnaeus*, 1758) in Poland and its protection".

Last impressions

I must admit, one cannot fail to fall in love with Stobnica and its inhabitants. I was filled with hope that one day, in the near future, I would return to see Stobnica enriched as the plans for the Wolf Park materialise. This would give a greater opportunity not only to provide the most up-to-date knowledge on wolves, but also to educate society and enable humans to change their perception of these wonderful creatures.

I enjoyed my short visit here so much that I wish I had more time to stay and listen to more of Zenon's wonderful stories. The most memorable one describes a visiting choir who were so moved by the wolves, and the fact that they could get so close to them, that when they were leaving they sang a valedictory song to express their gratitude. Following a short silence, the wolves howled in reply as if expressing, in return, their appreciation! As silence resumed, the choristers had tears in their eyes.

In the absence of the Professor and Jacek, members of public are not allowed to enter the wolves' enclosure but I leave the Station with an invitation to come back and meet the wolves face-to-face. So, watch this space for future reports on my close encounters with the ambassadors of Stobnica!

Resources and references:

- "Wolf (*Canis lupus Linnaeus*, 1758) in Poland and its protection", book by Prof. Bereszynski
- Articles by Prof. Bereszynski and Agnieszka Hryniewicz. Poznan University of Agriculture journal, issue 9-10/06.
- Conversation with Zenon Madaj. 2006. Review of Prof. Bereszynski's biography.
- Conversations with Jacek Wieckowski and Aleksandra Kraszkiewicz. 2006.

I would like to thank everyone who has supported me in writing my very first article!



Professor Andrzej Bereszynski

Prof. Bereszynski is Head of the Department of Zoology. He obtained his PhD in 1976 from the Institute of Applied Zoology of Poznan Agricultural University. Since 1993, he had been working as an associate professor, and in 1999, obtained the title of Professor of Agricultural Sciences.

The studies of Prof. Bereszynski focus mainly on rare and endangered species, mainly birds and mammals, studies on their behaviour in natural and breeding conditions, and the protection of nature and the environment, as well as the conservation of the biotopes. Between 1968 and 1986, he conducted studies on the ecology of bustards, their occurrences and breeding, resulting in the publication of a chapter devoted to these species in two editions of the "Polish Red Book of Animals". Since 1974, he has also participated in the successful reintroduction of the European Beaver.

Prof. Bereszynski is the author of over 100 publications, including fifty five original, creative works, and nineteen scientific books; is President of the Animal Protection Council, and a leader on several research projects in Poland. He has received numerous awards for his achievements.

In recent years, he has devoted time to the protection of wolves in Poland. This research has focused on wolf occurrences and changes in their population. Since 1996, scientific studies have been carried out at the University Research Station in Stobnica, including a breeding programme. He also aims to create the very first Wolf Park in Poland and is the author of the scientific book "Wolf (*Canis lupus Linnaeus*, 1758) in Poland and its protection".

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(sub-editors note: there is also a website of wolf images at www.wild.art.pl - just click on the links, even though it is in Polish, and you'll find your way around the various contributors)



Ants of the Ancient Land

by Robin Herne

Photos by Melainne Readings

The wolf has long held a place in Celtic mythology: Ireland was once known as the Wolf Land due the great preponderance of the beast there, so much so that even Shakespeare wrote, "To the howling of the Irish Wolves against the moon" in 'As You Like It'. This beautiful creature, so much maligned by other cultures, was held in high esteem by the early Gaelic tribes. Wolves were declared extinct in England in 1486, in Scotland they lasted until about 1743 (various kills each claim to be the last.) Over in Ireland, they lasted until sometime between 1720 and 1780 (one hunter claimed to have killed the last in 1773.) It was the habit of the ruling Irish Council to pay hunters up to £5 or £6 (a hefty sum of money in those days) per dead wolf, so determined had they become to drive the beast to extinction by that time. In this habit they echoed the behaviour of the mainland British authorities who also paid large sums for dead wolves. The meat was

often eaten (what it tastes like, I neither know nor wish to) and the skins used in decorating clothing, as wall hangings etc.

The medieval Welsh story of Prince Llywellyn echoes the sentiment: He came home from a hunt to find blood all over his child's nursery, and mistakenly assumed his faithful dog Gelert had eaten the baby. He killed the poor thing in a rage. Further inspections showed the body of a dead wolf, and the still-living baby, whom the faithful dog had saved. Wales also gives a hint of a story, with a Triad telling us that Ceridwen, on her many travels, gifted a wolf cub to a king who passed it on to Menwaed at Arttechwedd. What became of the beast, or what magical properties it possessed, we no longer know.

The Gaelic language contains a number of words to describe our lupine friends, including: *madadh allaidh* (also referring to a wild dog), *breach*, *fael*, *faol*, *mactire* (poetically,

'son of the wild'.) Related words include *faol-conda* (wolfish), *faol-cu* (a ferocious warrior), *faol-rnum* (slinking about like a wolf), *cuan*, *conairt* or *cuanairt* (wolf pack), *faoltac* (a place full of wolves), *cuanac* (a place haunted by wolves), *an tioma-taisean* (lycanthropy), *coin-riocht* (a werewolf) etc. One of the Gaelic months was known as *Faoilleach*, the wolf month (the same meaning being ascribed by the Anglo-Saxons to the same time of year) and corresponding to the mid-January to mid-February period.

The story of the great chieftain Cormac mac Art described him being taken away as an infant and reared by a she-wolf (indeed, Cormac itself means 'wolf-son'.) In adulthood he was accompanied by a loyal pack.

The wintery goddess An Cailleach, who appears in Scotland and Ireland, is described as riding on the back of a giant wolf, the icy winds whipping about her. The eight hags in





her service ride similar steeds, though in one version they are goats! The Morrighan took the guise of a she-wolf when attacking Cuchulainn, after he refused her offer of aid in his final battle. Both these goddesses are somewhat fearsome, and we should not fall into the trap of imagining this ancient culture as a Californian love-in where the wolf was a cuddly bundle of serenity and fur. The myths indicate that people recognised that wolves were dangerous animals, and admired their ferocity along with their capacity to work well as a pack.

Some commentators have suggested that the hero Conall Cernach may be an euhemerised form (gods were based on heroes who after their deaths lived on as gods in the minds of people) of the antlered deity who appears on the Gundestrop cauldron, usually assumed to be Cernunnos by most modern pagans. The cauldron displays the deity surrounded by all manner of animals, including a wolf, and holding a large ram-horned serpent. Conall, whose name means 'wolf-like', is described as defeating a gigantic snake in one of his myths. A tenuous link, perhaps, but the two may be associated.

Christianity, of course, could not resist getting in on the act. That tedious old prig Saint Patrick reputedly turned Veretius, a Welsh chieftain, into a wolf. Later, in the 12th century, Bishop Gerald of Wales was still

having to send missionaries over to convert the recalcitrant Irish villages. One such pilgrim ventured into the tribal lands of Ossory in Tipperary, a county reputedly filled with werewolves, and encountered a lycanthrope. The werewolf invited him back to its cave and, for reasons best known to himself, he agreed to go along. There he found the lycanthrope's wife lying on her deathbed. For reasons even less believable, she wanted Last Rites, that she might enter Heaven shriven (her sins confessed). The surviving spouse related how the people of Clann Alta had to go about in wolf form as the result of an old curse laid on them by the Abbot Natalis. Every seven years, two of the tribe had to become werewolves, to atone some long forgotten sin. The Church may have deemed lycanthropy a God-visited curse, but one wonders how the probably pagan peoples of Clan Alta viewed their furry condition. Other stories also viewed the people of Ossory as particularly lupine, such as "The Wonders of Ireland". This Middle Irish text talks about the many of Ossory people being descendants of Laignech Faelad, brother of an ancient king. We will come back to the significance of his surname later, but he was believed to be a lycanthrope. The "Annals of the Four Masters" talks of another Ossory werewolf, Faelchar ua Maelodra, whose death in battle led to various strange and sinister omens ~ including that of a talking wolf.

The "Wonders", along with texts by another Church writer Augustinus Hibernicus, describe people going out as werewolves, whilst their bodies remained asleep and guarded by their relatives ~ for fear that, if the trance were unexpectedly broken, the soul could not return to the body. Modern pagans would identify this as astral projection, coupled with the ability to cause the astral body to take on an animal guise.

Other werewolf stories include the three female beasties who dwelt in the Cave of Cruachan in County Roscommon, leaving it at Samhain (first day of November, marking the ancient start of winter) to ravage the local farm animals. Eventually the bard Cascarach entranced them with music, allowing the warrior Caoilte to get close enough to spear them. The law book "Bretha Crolige", which dealt with the care of the injured or ill, records female werewolves as being one of the sorts of women who could not claim sick maintenance from the public purse, but had to be cared for by their own families. Along with satirists and women who consorted with the Sidhe (fairies), the lycanthropes were regarded as especially dangerous. However, the same text specifies that such women must be tolerated because *'it is fitting revenge which she performs, and does not injure her honour price on account of it'*. Whether the she-wolves were shape-shifting to avenge injustices



against themselves, or if they were akin to licensed hit-women hired to right wrongs (like a fur-clad A-Team) is difficult to tell. The mostly male digberga could be seen as having their wolfishness tolerated because they could be called upon to right wrongs done by rival tribes, or others difficult to reach by conventional legal recourse.

The Fianna themselves are compared to a wolf pack in several old manuscripts. The act of raiding enemy tribes is described as fælad, or wolfing. Just as the hairy Norse types went a-viking, so the Gaelic ones went a-wolfing! In a description reminiscent of the attacks made by the berserkers (or, perhaps more specifically, the ulfethnar), the fianna were said to gather round the enemy camps and howl. The Welsh word *bleiddiaid* means both a wolf-pack and a war-band. Fionn's grandson was Faellan, whose name means little wolf. It is curious that Fionn was born with deer-associations but, a few generations later, the family had gone lupine. From hunted to hunter. This might reflect a change in spiritual allegiance to a different deity, or maybe a deity who goes through cyclic change from deer to wolf, or intermarriage between members of a Deer Clan with those of a Wolf Clan, or a change in the nature of the Fianna such that myth records a symbolic change of animal metaphor, or a variety of other explanations. We can hypothesise, but not pronounce with any certainty.

The warrior-poet Caoilte recites a poem to St Patrick, which is found in 'Acallam ne Senórach (The Colloquy of the Elders), and is called "Memory of the Past". Translated by Máiréad Perron, it runs as follows:

*Winter is cold, the wind has risen,
the fierce stark-wild stag arises,
not warm tonight is the unbroken mountain,
even though the swift stag be belling.*

*The stag of Slieve Carran of the assemblies does
not lay his side to the ground,
the stag of the head of cold
Aughtly listens likewise to wolf-music.
I Caoilte, and brown-haired Diarmait, and keen
light
Oscar, used to listen to wolf-music at the end of
a very cold night.*

*Well, forsooth, sleeps the brown stag pressing his
hide to
Corran's earth as though he were beneath the
water of
the Tuns at the end of a truly cold night!*

*Today I am old and aged; few men do I
recognize; I used to brandish a
pointed spear hardily on a morning of truly
cold ice.*

The poem can be read as a straightforward nature poem, but if we bear in mind that Fionn was the Great Stag who married a

deer-woman, then it was he who was belling in the cold, and now lies pressed to the earth (ie, dead.). The wolf-music was the chanting and war-cries of the Fianna. It is a poem of mourning for all that has passed, as the warriors of old have gone and the bitter-cold age of Patrick and his sort has set in. Lest the reader get too depressed, bear in mind that one day winter will end!

The great warrior-poet who revised the Brehon law codes, and possibly wrote the Auraicept na nEces, was Cenn Faelad, whose name implies that he was the head of such a band of wild and wolfish warriors.

The legal term *cu-glas*, usually translated as meaning Grey Wolf or Green Wolf (*glas* is the ambiguous colour of the sea), was applied to people who existed outside of the law - just as the Saxons spoke of criminals on the run as *Wolfsheads*. In Welsh myth, Gwydion and Gilfaethwy lived as exiles in the woods for three years, one of these spent as wolves. Irish outlaws were called *diberga*, and were said to have a particular hair style (exactly what no longer seems to be known) called *culan*; 'wolf locks'. The Bretha Crolige mentions the *diberg* as part of a triad with the satirist and the druid, whose legal status may not exceed that of a *boaire* (a sort of magistrate, which is quite a high rank for a supposed outcaste, suggestive that they may have been more swords-for-hire than hunted criminals.) It may not be mere coincidence that Irish druids were also said to have a peculiar hair-style to indicate their status.

The savage band of exiled pirates who besieged da Derga's hostel were lead by the three sons of Don Dessa, who were said to have known the lycanthropic arts, and taught them to the other brigands. The same story tells us that the bird-king Conaire Mor held seven wolves hostage, to enforce a peace treaty with the wolves of Ireland. One passage refers to a character called Maclocc, who may well be the leader of the wolves (whether this

is to be taken literally as meaning lupines, or more figuratively as referring to war-bands is uncertain.) Near the end of the tale, the hero Mac Cecht, who has been sent out to find water for the dying king, gets brutally hacked about by the raiders. He calls on a passing woman for help, telling her he thinks he may have an ant gnawing at his wounds. She examines them and finds a wolf buried up to its shoulders in Mac Cecht's side, chewing the hero's flesh! Echoing back his words, she replies that he has an "ant of the ancient earth" setting about him.

Insular British and Irish saints are often portrayed with wolves: Saint Patrick is said to have preached to wolves; another Irish saint, St. Maedoc of Ferns, who died in AD 626, is held to have shared his food with a starving wolf. Sixth century Saint Columban, yet another Irish-born saint living in the forests, was never molested by wolves and lived amicably among them. Over in Galatia, the obscure, ascetic seventh century Saint Theodore counted wolves and bears as allies. Like Cormac, the Irish Saint Ailbe was suckled by a she-wolf.

Just as Cormac was named after the grey beasts, so there are other good Celtic wolf names, should you have a baby or a passing lupine to name. These include: Bledig, Bleddyn, Faolan (with variant spellings of Fallon, Faellan, Fellen), Conmac, Connor, Conchobar, Conn, Connla, Conan, Conaire, Conlan, Luchdonn. Ladies can choose between Conchobarre, Conwenna, and Faoiltiarna (Wolf Lady.) Surname-wise, the MacLennans, Mac Tyres and MacMillans have wolf emblems.

Recommended reading:

Carey, J., "Werewolves in Medieval Ireland", *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* #44, 2002 (pages 36 - 72)

Gantz, J., "Early Irish Myths", Penguin Classics, ISBN - 0140443975



Helping to Keep Wolves in the Wild

The Sharp End of Wolf Conservation

*by Denise Taylor and Chris Senior
Photos: pages 15 & 16 by Chris Senior
pages 17 & 18 by Chisty Les,
Biological Station, Russia*

Deep in Russia's southern taiga, north west of Moscow, lies Chisty Les (Clean Forest) Biological Station, a project that was started some 25 years ago by Valentin Pazetnov and Viktor Bologov, who were interested in the conservation of bears and wolves.

Chisty Les is now run by three generations of these two dedicated families, plus scores of volunteers and other project staff. Vladimir Bologov followed his father into wolf conservation and now spends all of his time on research, education and capacity building.

My colleagues, Chris Senior and Alex Hampson, and I visited Chisty Les in August and stayed with Vladimir and his family in Bubonitsy village. The white knuckle taxi-drive from Moscow took us over six hours, the majority of which was through birch and pine forest, which lined the road on either side. The immensity and scale of the forest put a whole new perspective on some of the old fairy-stories like Hansel and Gretel. The



Chisty Les - Eco Summer Schools.



Vladimir Bologov.

latter part of the journey was on undulating and potholed dirt roads, and it was a relief to get off the main highway, which was fraught with danger. We saw lots of risky overtaking, at least three accidents, and far too many posts adorned with floral tributes for victims of this nightmare road. (The overnight train definitely seems the better option next time we go over there.)

Having arrived in one piece, we were warmly greeted by Vladimir and his wife, Natasha, and their two eco-volunteers from Holland, Petter and Bettina, who were working at the project for three weeks

The next morning we set off to visit the rest of the Biological Station, which is spread over three sites. Our first stop was to see the film crew who are working on a series of documentaries for the project. This professional team, from Moscow Television, were keen to show us the two short videos they have produced on wolves and bears, and we spent a delightful morning viewing these before heading off for a walk to the lake.

The lake is an integral part of Chisty Les, and

it is here that the Eco Summer Schools have been held for children. There are a couple of wooden buildings by the lake, and the children camp out for two weeks and learn about the ecology of Russia, and associated conservation issues.

A new Education Centre has also just been completed at Chisty Les, which is three storeys high and built in traditional Russian log frame style. This impressive building will be officially opened in early 2007, but was already hosting small conferences and workshops, with a conference being held later that week for 60 bear biologists from all over Russia.

The next village we visited was also part of the Biological Station. It was an old abandoned village, and Vladimir has bought many of the houses so they can be used for accommodation for research students and volunteers. Here we met Laetitia who is a student from France. She originally came to the project for two weeks, and then again for two months, and is now staying for three years – such is the nature of Chisty Les, it



Chisty Les - New Education Centre.

captures the heart, soul and imagination; and other volunteers we spoke to had also previously stayed at the project.

Many parts of rural Russia are economically poor and even more so since the collapse of the socialist regime. This village had been abandoned as people left to find work in the



Sheep injured in wolf attack.

towns and cities. Visiting in the summer months was a pleasure (apart from catching the tail-end of the mosquito season), but you could easily see how hard it would be to survive a harsh winter here. The small wooden houses have no bathroom facilities (although Vladimir is now working to get this remedied), and no piped water. Even in summer, we could feel the remoteness of the place and how cut off we were from civilisation. There was no mobile telephone signal, and the landline connections are intermittent. Whilst this is enjoyable in the short term for those of us seeking the escape from the frantic pace of technological life in Western Europe, it could be difficult if you were staying longer.

Approximately 700 metres away from the house, in the forest, there is a wolf enclosure, covering 2.5 acres of land. During our visit, this was home to four juvenile wolves who

had been purchased from hunters with the help of a donation from the UKWCT. The wolves were being raised in captivity, with the minimum amount of human contact, with the aim of releasing them back into the wild. Chisty Les has already had success in raising and releasing over 120 bear cubs, but until recently hadn't attempted this with wolves.

Whilst in the village we also met Jason Badridze and Andrey Poyamkov. Look up the notes on this.

The next morning Vladimir received telephone calls from two villages in the region. One village had reported numerous sightings of a white wolf in the village, and the other had sustained a wolf attack, with one sheep being killed and two others injured.

Whilst speeding into action like some crack wolf-response team, the 4x4 decided it had had enough, started making funny rattling noises, and then gave up altogether. The problem was a broken distributor cap. A piece had broken off. The broken piece was still there, fortunately, so all we needed was the means to reattach it. An impossible task one might think, when stuck out in the middle of nowhere. We tried standing around staring at the engine – the universal human response? – but found that some superglue from a passing motorist, who had stopped to help, was more useful in getting us on our way again.



We arrived at the first village and drove around for a while before stopping at one of the houses. The owner came out to greet us, followed closely by his children. A lengthy conversation took place, and later Vladimir relayed to us that a white wolf had been seen by a number of villagers. Although very unusual, there have been previous reports of a white wolf in the region.

Our next visit was more fruitful. We were shown the two sheep which had survived a wolf attack, before being shown around the property, which was basically a house with land and outbuildings attached. Livestock in these situations is usually kept in a barn or outbuilding overnight, to keep it safe from predators. Most villagers also have at least one dog, generally chained up outside. Predation on dogs is a huge problem in rural areas, and Vladimir is working hard to convince people that part of this problem is the fact that keeping them chained up outdoors makes them an easy meal for wolves.



Villager and surviving sheep attacked by wolves.



On looking around the property, we could see that the forest line came to within ten metres of the house. This would give wolves good cover for making such attacks, and is something that needs to be addressed with the villagers. We spent some time talking to the villager who had lost the sheep, and he reported that this was the first attack they had had in over 25 years. Apparently the barn door had been left open in the night and the wolves had taken their opportunity. Vladimir will now work with the villagers to try deter the wolves from entering the village, using aversive conditioning techniques: Wolves are naturally wary creatures, and even simple methods such as putting brightly coloured balloons along a fence have been shown to work. Despite all this, the villager was not



upset or angry, but merely showed a pragmatic concern as to what he should have done differently to prevent the attack. And this despite it being one of only seven sheep he was looking after – some for the local ranger. This attitude of one man losing a seventh of his flock – animals needed as food through the winter – is markedly different to



the livestock growers of the USA – with herds thousands strong and often grazing on public lands – the majority of whom would like to see the wolf eradicated again, claiming that it threatens their livelihood.

The battle for wolf conservation in Russia is an uphill one. There is still a bounty on each wolf killed, and any method of killing a wolf can be used, including poison, which is banned in every other country except Russia, although this method is no longer widespread. The wolf population density around Chisty Les is high, and I have learned since returning from our visit that hunters killed 12 wolves in the area while we were there. One particular hunt killed a mother and six pups. Hunting is still a popular tradition, and even a cursory search on the internet will produce a list of companies that take hunting parties out to Russia.

Despite such adversity, there have been some notable successes: The project has managed to negotiate approval for a protected area of 12,000 hectares around the station; they have

just completed an impressive three-storey, traditionally built Education Centre, which hosted a bear conference for over 60 experts from all over Russia while we were there; the Ecological Summer School programme, which has been held at the Station for the past couple of years, is going from strength to strength; a film crew from Moscow television has volunteered their skills and experience to produce 12 documentary films for the project in order to raise awareness about the conservation of bears and wolves to a global audience; and, more importantly, there is some headway being made in changing attitudes: Vladimir and his colleagues have already converted some hunters to helping the project, and rather than going out shooting or trapping wolves to kill them, they are now helping to radio collar them and protect them.

The UK Wolf Conservation Trust is working in partnership with Education 4 Conservation and Norway's Nature Institute to provide support to Chisty Les. A funding bid has been submitted to DEFRA's Darwin Initiative, which supports poor countries that are rich in biodiversity. If successful, the funding will go a long way to setting up more education programmes, and conducting much needed biological research.

The UKWCT is also setting up a fundraising campaign so that Trust members and supporters can donate directly to the Russian project. If you would like to make a donation,



then please send it to the UKWCT, Butlers Farm, Beenham, Reading, Berkshire RG7 5NT. Please clearly mark your donation 'Russian Wolf Project'. Cheques should be made payable to the UK Wolf Conservation Trust. Any amount, no matter how small, will be donated directly to the project, and will make a difference.

We will continue to bring you updates through Wolf Print, Wolf Whistle and through our website.



The Region

Christy Les is in the village of Bubonitsy, in the Toropets district of Tver, one of 36 districts the region is divided into. Toropets covers 3,400 km², and is home to 30,700 inhabitants; the entire Tver region is 84,100 km² (0.49% of Russia's total area), populated by over 1.5 million people. Tver is half covered by southern boreal forest – or Taiga – typified by virgin spruce forest, mixed broadleaf-coniferous forest and secondary forest of birch and aspen, all growing on sandy soil; the remainder is a mixture of swamps, raised peat-bogs, lakes, rivers and a small number of meadows and exposed floodplains, and typical elevation is 200m. This mixture of habitats provides a sanctuary for wildlife, including wolves, brown bears, moose, wild boar, European mink, beaver, otter and over 200 bird species, including crane, black grouse, capercaillie and black stork. Historically, the region has had the highest wolf density in Russia, but this population has been in decline in recent years.



