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Published by:
The UK Wolf Conservation Trust
Butlers Farm, Beenham,
Reading RG7 5NT
Tel & Fax: 0118 971 3330
e-mail: ukwct@ukwolf.org
www.ukwolf.org

Denise Taylor
Tel: 01788 832658
Email: denise.taylor@btinternet.com

Editorial Team
Julia Bohanna, Andrew Matthews,
Gwynne Power, Sue Sefscik

Contributors to this issue:
Svetlana Baskakova, Ken Bealby, Lise Donnez,
Andrew Matthews, Pat Morris, Gwynne Power,
Sue Sefscik, Vladimir Shakula, Denise Taylor.

Design Team: Phil Dee Tel: 01788 546565
Stephanie Balbo, Paul Swainson

Patrons
Desmond Morris
Erich Klinghammer
Christoph Promberger

The UK Wolf Conservation Trust Directors
Nigel Bulmer
Charles Hicks
Tsa Palmer
Denise Taylor

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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.

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E ditorial



This issue comes with very sad news. In early March the UKWCT lost its founder and executive director, Roger Palmer. I have worked with Roger for the past seven or eight years, and have never ceased to be amazed by his capacity for work; at times enduring a punishing schedule even when he was seriously ill towards the end of his life. During this period, he kept the seriousness of his final illness from friends and colleagues at the Trust, and was very convincing when he claimed he was feeling much better. Attending a finance meeting just two weeks before his death, Roger was quite jovial and still plotting and planning the future of the Trust. He gave us no indication that his condition was terminal. This was the kind of determination Roger displayed in all his endeavours.

Roger was a very complex person. He was not always easy to work with, but he was a loyal friend, and extremely forthright, honest and direct in his approach. You always knew where you stood with Roger; whether you liked it or not. Many people he came into contact with saw him as a rather brusque man, but anyone who worked closely with Roger also witnessed a very caring and compassionate side to him. I will never forget his kindness when I suffered a personal tragedy four years ago.

To say the wolf world has lost a very great and dedicated man is an understatement. There are very few in any field who have the passion, drive and determination that Roger had, and I consider myself lucky to have had the privilege of working with him and being part of his vision that is now the UKWCT. This was not always an easy ride, but it was never boring, and one man who had the vision and also the capacity to make things happen in wolf conservation, has given others, including myself, a platform to follow our own visions in wolf conservation. Roger will be very greatly missed, and most definitely not forgotten.

March was a month of lows with the loss of Roger, but it also contained a high for me when I visited Bulgaria for a week and spent time with wolf biologist, Elena Tsingarska at the Balkani Wildlife Society project in the Pirin Mountains. Having worked in wolf conservation for over ten years, this was a wonderful highlight of my conservation career, made very special indeed when we tracked wild wolves up the mountainside and collected three lots of scat (some of which contained evidence of wild boar). You can read more about my adventures on page 15.

We also report on the travels of Lise Donnez and Pierre Zuppiroli and their time spent in Denali National Park. Read about their experiences on page 12.

Following the theme of extinct wolves in the Winter 2003 issue, regular contributor, Sue Sefscik, continues her look back in time at another extinct gray wolf sub-species, *Canis lupus hattai*, from Japan. Her article also reports on wolves in China.

The UKWCT Spring Seminar was another success, with guest speakers from the USA and Poland. Read the summary of this event on page 7.

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PICTURE CREDITS

Geoffrey Gersie for his photo of Vucho. Alex Hampson and Denise Taylor



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NORTH AMERICA

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Alberta

Wolf numbers in Banff National Park have been steadily declining since the animals were reintroduced in 1980. One group, the Bow Valley pack, is close to being wiped out after the death of a male wolf last December. Another group, the Fairholme pack has dwindled from 17 to four over the last three years. Since 1981, 52 wolves have been killed on roads in Banff, Kootenay and Yoho National Parks, many others have been shot or trapped legally outside the parks' boundaries. Unlike the U.S.A. where federal law protects grey wolves, hunters of wolves in Alberta do not need a licence. Conservationists suggest the setting up of buffer zones around the parks, in which limits would be set on the hunting and trapping of wolves. Opponents of this suggestion maintain that there are far more wolves in Alberta than the conservationists have estimated.

United States

Alaska

Alaska has expanded its wolf control program into the south central area of the state. The wolves are shot by airborne hunters. The Alaskan Board of Fish and Game wants to remove 140 wolves from an 8000 square mile region in the Nelchina Basin, where the moose population has halved following the last wolf cull in 1995. Moose calves are particularly vulnerable to wolf-attack. The control program has prompted a Connecticut-based animal rights group to launch a campaign to boycott Alaska's tourist industry, which is worth an estimated two billion dollars per year. Defenders of Wildlife have submitted a fifteen-page petition to the Alaskan Interior Minister asking her to give a ruling on whether the program contravenes the 1971 Airborne Hunting Act.

Arizona

Five Mexican wolves captured between 1977 and 1980 were taken to the Arizona - Sonora Desert Museum to become the

source pack for recovery efforts in Arizona and New Mexico. At present there are about 200 wolves in 29 U.S. zoos and ten Mexican zoos. Zoos in Cheyenne Mountain, Denver, Pueblo and Albuquerque have joined together in a wolf forum which offers biological information on the animals. For further details log-on to www.wolfforum.org

Idaho

It has been confirmed that a wolf whose carcass was found in the Squaw Creek area in May 2003 was poisoned by Compound 1080. This is a colourless, tasteless, odourless, water-soluble substance. Its ingestion by humans can lead to respiratory failure, seizures and heart-attacks.

Killing an animal protected by the Endangered Species Act is punishable by a fine of up to \$100,000 and a year's imprisonment.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is offering a reward of \$2,500 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible.

Wisconsin

As part of a search for non-lethal ways to control predators, researchers have been carrying out experiments to see if radio-activated guard boxes (RAG) can deter wolves from attacking livestock. When triggered by the approach of a wolf wearing a radio collar, RAG boxes broadcast recordings of loud noises such as gunfire. The researchers compared wolves' consumption of road-killed deer carcasses before and after being exposed to the noises and found that it dropped between two-thirds and three-quarters.

The drawbacks to the RAG scheme are: most wolves are not radio-collared, and animals become used to the noises after repeated exposure.

The results of a survey carried out on 535 respondents by the Wildlife Conservation Society and the University of Wisconsin were published in December 2003. The survey reveals that social attitudes and occupation are more likely to influence people's attitude to wolves than individual encounters with the



animals, or loss of pets and livestock. 74% of the 124 bear hunters included in the survey were in favour of reducing or eliminating Wisconsin's wolf population. Only 44% of livestock producers favoured such measures and only 28.5% of general residents. Overall 17.4% of those surveyed were in favour of wolf elimination and

there was moderate support for wolf recovery.

After being wiped out in Wisconsin in 1950, packs from neighbouring Minnesota have been recolonizing the state and the population currently stands at about 350.

Since the survey was conducted, wolves have been federally down listed from an

endangered species to a threatened species, allowing lethal control where necessary.

Wyoming

In January the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service rejected Wyoming's wolf management plan, which is likely to delay removal of the wolf from the Endangered Species List. There

are now some 235 wolves in Wyoming and ranchers and hunters are concerned that wolf attacks on game and livestock will increase if there is no state plan allowing flexibility in the control of wolves. A spokesperson involved in the hunting industry has calculated that wolves kill more than 6,000 elk per year in the Greater Yellowstone .



Ecosystem

Wyoming proposed a 'dual classification' system in which wolves would be treated as trophy game in areas near Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, and be subject to regulation hunting. Elsewhere in the state wolves would be classified as predators and their hunting would be subject to little regulation. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has objected that such a plan would seriously conflict with Wyoming's agreement to maintain a minimum stable population of wolves.

The death of two sister wolves in Yellowstone Park means that none of the original 35 wolves released in the park in 1995/6 now survives. One of the wolves, 42F, was killed in February by a rival pack. 41F, ill with mange and limping badly, was shot by game

officials ten days later after she killed a new-born calf.

REST OF WORLD

Estonia

Wolves have been declared a protected species in Estonia, despite having been granted special permission by the EU to continue its tradition of wolf-hunting. In 1990 the wolf population was estimated at 600 - 700, but late last year some scientists put the figure as low as 70 - 80. In its negotiations to join the EU, Estonia agreed to maintain a wolf population of at least 100 - 150.

Ethiopia

An outbreak of rabies has been raging among Ethiopian wolves in the Bale Mountains. Members of the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation

Program were given permission to implement an emergency vaccination scheme and captured and injected an initial sample of 60 wolves. A further 70 wolves were vaccinated afterwards. Though the death rate is now slowing, it is estimated that between 75% and 81% of the Web Valley population has been lost, leaving only 15 - 20 adults and sub adults.

India

Scientists at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in Hyderabad report that their genetic studies of Indian wolves show that they are the most ancient of wolf populations and that India was at the centre of the origin of wolves. There are two subspecies of wolf in India: the Himalayan wolf, found only in the Himalayas, has a population of approximately 350; the grey wolf

which is found throughout the Indian peninsula has a population of approximately 1500. Wolves are thought to have migrated to India between one and two million years ago. Their subsequent evolution was uncontaminated by other wolf-like canines.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed news and updates for Wolves of the World. Our special thanks to Pat Morris (Wolfseeker) for the regular supply of wolf news from around the world, and to Andrew Matthews for his sub-editing work. Articles that are reprinted in full are appropriately credited with the author's name and details of where the article was first published.

The UKWCT loses its Founder and Executive Director

ROGER PALMER 1947-2004



Photo: UKWCT

The wolf world has lost a seasoned wolf conservationist who worked passionately for wolves for many years. Roger Palmer, UKWCT founder and executive director, passed away on Saturday 6 March 2004 following a long illness.

Roger set up the UKWCT in 1995 after keeping wolves privately for a number of years at Butlers Farm. Wolves were one of Roger's driving passions, and he never wavered from his vision for the Trust. His energy and drive seemed boundless to those who worked closely with Roger, and although his single-mindedness often drove us to distraction, we all admired and respected him for the work he was doing for wolf conservation.

Roger has left a huge gap, and will be greatly missed, not only for the larger than life character he was, but also for the amount of work he carried out, often working late into the evening to keep in touch with volunteers and Trust members.

One of Roger's main aims was to build a robust organisational infrastructure for the Trust. Thankfully this was achieved before he died, and his work will carry on, with everyone having vowed to continue his legacy and work to achieve his vision and goals.

UK Wolf Conservation Trust Spring Seminar April 2004

by Pat Adams

Photos: Jay Panchmati

The Assembly room at Cheam School, Headingley, was once again full. Wolf lovers from around the country had gathered to soak up more knowledge on their favourite carnivore. And once again the speakers engaged by the Trust lived up to the high standards we have all come to expect.

MONTY SLOAN

Monty Sloan is a Wolf Behaviour Specialist and Wolf Park Photographer in the USA where his years of working with captive wolves have resulted in the largest collection of wolf images and depictions of their social behaviour anywhere in the world (see www.wolfphotography.com).

Monty has worked with wolves for many years in Alaska and in Yellowstone during the wolf reintroduction programme. This programme has proved so successful that wolf numbers in the park are now in excess of 4,000.

Measures are now underway to remove the wolf from the endangered list although in order for this to happen all states, including Montana, Dakota, Wisconsin and Minnesota have to agree legislation and this is holding up the de-listing.

EFFECTS ON THE ECOSYSTEM

Ninety percent of wolves kill elk that are usually 14 years of age or older and, as they are no longer reproducing by this age this has no effect on the elk population.

Half of what wolves kill is actually eaten by other animals; carrion is often left for others. By limiting the presence of elk and other ungulates there has been a significant increase in the number of aspen groves as they are not grazing on the new saplings. This also has led to the return of many species of native birds to the park.

There has also been a dramatic reduction in the Coyote population although it was unnaturally high with 4,000 wolves to 4,000,000 Coyotes!

WŁODZIMIERZ JEDRZEJEWSKI

Professor Włodzimierz Jędrzejewski is Vice-President for Science at the Mammal Research Institute, Polish Academy of Sciences in Białowieża, Poland. He has extensive international experience including research trips to Canada and Russia and has lectured all over the world including at the 2003 World Wolf Congress in Banff.

ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION PROBLEMS OF WOLVES IN POLAND

The Polish Białowieża Forest has been preserved by Polish kings for over 500 years. It is an area of primeval forest situated on the Polish/Belarus border, well connected to forest areas to the North and South West. It has a natural preserved habitat with deciduous trees, many alders, supports 3000 species of fungi and over 20,000 types of insect.

The forest also supports Bison, which is the largest mammal, moose, elk, red deer, roe deer and wild boar, together with two large predators the lynx and the wolf.

During 1995 the first wolf project was undertaken. The forest was searched and prey remains were studied but this was very restrictive. Since then, 12 wolves have been captured, using an ancient hunting technique known as Fladry (flags attached to ropes forming a boundary that wolves will not cross), and radio-collared, providing researchers with a wealth of data about the wolves.

As a result of this study it was determined that there were 3 packs inhabiting the area.

During 2001 and 2002 a census was carried out throughout the State Forest districts and national parks. In total, 440 forest districts, and 22 national parks were divided into 75 co-ordinated regions. This was a huge operation carried out simultaneously in every area. Wolves were counted, and details of how many pups, how many den sites, and signs of prey were all catalogued.

All data were analysed and the pack territories mapped precisely.

Distribution:

Number of Packs	110 – 130
Total Number of Wolves	480-660
Density of Wolf Population	1-3 individuals per 100km ²
Mean Pack size	4.5 individuals

In eastern Poland the wolf populations were growing and new areas where being covered, but in western Poland the wolf could not seem to establish itself. It became apparent that migrational barriers were responsible for this situation – central Poland has dense urban areas and these were impassable to wolves. Road traffic in this area had increased substantially over the past 20 years.

Migration corridors were studied and it was found that these routes, once used, were no longer connected. These findings were put to the Polish Government and it was agreed that these corridors should be opened up for the wolves and the areas protected from development. EU monies designated for forestry development would be used for this project.

If the wolf population was unable to migrate to new areas, existing packs would be fragmented and eventually would die out. Highways and express roads will be in direct conflict with animal populations and migration corridors. The proposed Battica road would cut the migration corridors in two places.

Overpasses constructed to aid migration have been used in Canada but would they work in Poland?

Following Włockek's presentation, the UKWCT presented his Institute with a cheque for £2,000 from the UK Wolf Conservation Trust towards further research and work with wolves in Poland.

After a question and answer session, everyone had lunch before enjoying

a walk with the Trust's wolves, Duma and Dakota, in the grounds of the school. Although it rained steadily, no-one was deterred from the walk.

A sodden group of wolf enthusiasts finally made their way home after a thoroughly enjoyable and well-organised day.





Wolves of South Kazakhstan

by By Vladimir Shakula and Svetlana Baskakova

Photos: Vladimir Shakula and Svetlana Baskakova

Kazakhstan is a young post-Soviet republic situated in Eurasia between Russia and the Middle Asian countries. The territory of Kazakhstan is vast: its length from west to east is 2,925 km and from north to south it is 1,600 km. The northern and central areas are covered in wooded or treeless steppe and desert landscapes. Mountains form much of the southern border.

This article is about wolves of the South Kazakhstan Oblast (Province). The administrative centre of the oblast is Shymkent (N 42° 19'; E 69° 36'). The natural zones of South Kazakhstan are varied. It is mostly plains, but deserts cover much of the central parts of the oblast where the Kyzylkum Desert is found. To the north are the Moinkum and Betpakdala Deserts. The main river is the Syr-darya which flows through a flood plain where low forest grows. In the central, south-eastern parts of the oblast are the Western Tien Shan mountains. The main ranges are the Syrdarian Karatau and Talas Alatau which rise to 4,300 metres.

The fauna of the region is rich and varied. In the desert and semi-desert zones live djairan (goitred gazelle), jungle cat, spotted cat, saiga, sand hare, corsac fox, bustards, and sand grouse. The mountain fauna is also distinctive and includes snow leopard, marmot, Tien Shan bear, ibex, argali, red deer, lynx, badger, porcupine, chukar, and snowcock. The common or grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) is widely distributed in all these natural zones.

Scientists agree that the Western Tien Shan Mountains are inhabited by the Central Asian subspecies or Tibetan wolf (*Canis lupus chanco*, Cray), but it is not clear which subspecies inhabits the South Kazakhstan oblast plain. It may be the desert wolf (*Canis lupus desertorum*, Bogdanov) or the steppe wolf (*Canis lupus campestris*, Dwigubski), and it is possible that both subspecies coexist. The nature and location of the boundary between the populations of mountain and plain wolves

is not known.

Very little research has been carried out on wolves in this part of the world and generally, there are more questions than answers. During the era of the Soviet Union, some studies of wolves were made, but in Kazakhstan, since independence in 1991, nobody has carried out research into wolves and the government has not supported scientific research proposals. Records of counts of wolves in the hunting department are not reliable because they were made by unskilled workers and so population estimates are inaccurate. In the South Kazakhstan Oblast, it is estimated there are between 300 to 2,000 individuals.

Wolf ecology was studied by the Soviet scientists A Sludskoi and A Fedosenko in the 1960s and 70s and their studies are considered accurate, but their investigations are in the context of a policy of control of wolves as a pest, and within an ardent hunting culture. Wolves were seen as getting in the way of the projected targets of the five year plans for agricultural production and hunting. The result of this obsolete view of wolves as a problem is the recently published decree of the South Kazakhstan administrators concerning the introduction of bounties for wolves. In the document "Concerning the Organisation of Control of Certain Species of Predator", it is said that the numbers of these predators are growing, their attacks on domestic animals are increasing in frequency and that they have a role in the spread of rabies. Therefore, it is argued, it is necessary to organise a hunting team to shoot wolves all-the-year round and give bounties for the shooting of wolves and jackals: 6,000 tenge (about \$40) per adult wolf, 2,500 tenge (about \$16) per cub and 2,000 tenge (about \$13) per jackal. This document demonstrates the present attitude to wolves in Kazakhstan.

Generally, we can summarise as follows:

- The full taxonomic status of wolves in Kazakhstan has not been studied

- The population status, including numbers of wolves, is not known
- The real amount of damage to agriculture from wolves has not been assessed
- The ecological education of local people is at a low level
- Government administrators consider wolves as pests and they retain a policy of wolf extermination
- The majority of the community considers wolves as destructive animals which present a real threat not only to domestic and wild animals but to people
- The experiences of foreign countries and the attitudes of international organisations and communities to wolves are not known to the inhabitants of South Kazakhstan.

There are some specialists and organisations who understand that the wolf, as a living organism, has its place in Nature and has a right to live there. The authors of this article have worked in Zapovedniks (Nature Reserves) of Middle Asia for more than 20 years, and have studied the ecology of large animals, including wolves. The wolf does not only eat the fresh meat but as far as is known, its food includes carrion and plants. Fruits, berries, and other plant food can form 12% to 80% of the wolf's diet depending on conditions and the season. In the mountains, wolves eat notable quantities of apples, pears, blackberries and even rosehips from the dog rose. Rodents always make up a major part of the wolf's diet.

It is interesting that the wolf controls the breeding of other predators, for example, the fox which is the main carrier of rabies in Middle Asia. There is no doubt that the wolf has a role to play in helping to maintain a healthy ecosystem. The wolf does not only attack sick or weak animals but also animals with particular patterns of behaviour and as mentioned before, it also eats carrion. Therefore, information about wolves resulting from faecal analysis is often not reliable. It





cannot be considered an absolute fact that the presence of red deer hair in wolf faeces means that animal was the prey of wolves. The deer could have perished for many other reasons and the wolf was simply cleaning up the remains of carrion.

It is clearly of paramount importance to try and change attitudes towards wolves as destructive and dangerous animals. And while it may well be necessary to control the numbers of predators, it is first of all necessary to study the problem i.e. to define the taxonomic rank of South Kazakhstan wolves and their ecological role and to study the impacts of wolves predations on wild and domestic animals. Only after such research can the appropriate recommendations be made.

People have to change their attitude to wolves as a dangerous and fierce animal requiring extermination. The wolf is a smart, beautiful and strong animal earning a respectful attitude as an inalienable component of Nature. The ecological NGO "Wild Nature" has planned a chain of measures for solutions to the "wolf problem" in South Kazakhstan. Specifically, we would like to carry out research on wolf ecology. In parallel, work on changing attitudes to wolves among the community will be provided by lectures with demonstrations of the live handling of wolves. With this end in view, the NGO "Wild Nature" is going to bring two young wolves from Shymkent Zoo.

WOLVES IN SHYMKENT ZOO

The three zoos in Kazakhstan are in Almaty, Karaganda and Shymkent. Shymkent State Zoo was established in 1980 on the outskirts of the town. It is a big centre, the main aims of which are the conservation of endangered and rare animals, scientific research, and ecological education. The zoo is also an animal research laboratory. Scientists organize excursions and lectures for visitors. There is a lecture hall and biological room equipped with a computer, a television, a tape-recorder, herbariums and other biological exhibits.

Shymkent zoo is a real green island: there are 2,000 ornamental trees, 550 fruit trees,

about 10,000 roses and 800 red lilies. Hedges extend throughout the zoo. Its total area is 30 hectares. There are 43 open air cages with several lakes and a pool for fin-footed animals. More than 1,300 individual animals are maintained in the zoo's collection. There are 160 species including 32 of fish, 3 of amphibian, 15 of reptile, 60 of bird and 50 of mammal. About 30 inhabitants are listed in the IUCN's Red Book of Rare and Endangered Species for Kazakhstan.

Black griffons, porcupines, argali, spotted deer, Przhevalsky's horse, lamas, brown bears, and of course, wolves successfully breed in the zoo. Wolves live and breed in the suitably equipped, open air cages. Each open air cage has a 4m x 4.5m summer ground and a 2m x 1.5m winter den. There is also a septic tank and running drinking water. The cages are cleaned daily. For the safety of staff, there is a sliding gate and for the safety of visitors, there is a triple metal fence.

Five wolves live in the zoo. Kaskirby, which simply means wolf in the Kazak language, is the original male wolf and will be 12 years old in May. He came to the zoo on the 15th June 1992. He was brought by hunters who caught him in South Kazakhstan. Of course, his origins are not known to us. Data for the rest of the wolves in the zoo are noted down in a record book. The she-wolf, Koktem, ("Spring" in Kazak) was born on the 10th April 1996. Her Mother was Nauriz, ("March") and her Father is Kaskirby. Nauriz was also from South Kazakhstan, and she has since died. Last

year, Kaskirby and Koktem produced five cubs, two of which were given to a Kazakh film studio for making the film "Nomads." The fate of these young wolves is unknown. The remaining three young male wolves are a real attraction at the zoo. They are not aggressive but active and sociable. They have a good appetite and are of a cheerful disposition.

The wolves are fed every day except Sunday. Every Monday they are fed rabbits. They are always fed at the same time at 1550 hours. The feeding varies according to season. In spring and summer they are fed 3kg of meat, 0.5kg of fish, 250ml milk and 1 raw egg per wolf. In autumn and winter, fish oil is added to the summer ration at 5ml per individual. The cost of feeding each wolf each day is about \$8.

The wolves attract a lot of attention. Visitors are interested in the wolves' upkeep and breeding in captivity. At the end of February and the beginning of March 2004, the female wolf, Koktem, was put in with Kaskir, and it is hoped that this will produce pups this year. Although the specialists are happy with this event, they feel a little anxious. How will the pups be fed? Soon, the NGO "Wild Nature" is going to take care of two wolves, and we are looking for organisations which will help take care of the wolves or finance their feeding at the zoo.

NGO Wild Nature
and Latipsha Aliev Shymkent Zoological Park
The Republic of Kazakhstan



CANIS LUPUS IN

by Sue M. Sefscik

There are a number of subspecies of *canis lupus* in China. The wolf of Mongolia and China is called *Canis lupus laniger*. In this context, *laniger* is defined as woolly. It can also be named *Canis lupus chanco* with a variation on that of *Canis lupus chanku*. A common name is the Chinese or Tibetan wolf. This species is generally considered to be a medium sized wolf with long, lightly colored fur. Like all wolves, he migrates and can be found inhabiting Mainland China, Mongolia, Manchuria, Tibet and southwest Russia.

The two subspecies of *Canis lupus* that inhabited Japan are probably now extinct. *Canis lupus hattai* (also known as *rex*) was a wolf once found in Hokkaido, Japan. Some taxonomists believe that it still survives on Sakhalin Island, although this is doubtful. Its common name was the Japanese wolf. *Canis lupus hodophilax* once roamed Honshu, Japan and records show the last one was killed in 1905. It was supposedly much smaller than *Canis lupus hattai*. Its common name was the Hondo Japanese wolf.

CANIS LUPUS LANIGER IN CHINA

China's exact wolf population numbers remain unknown. However, it is estimated that 10,000 to 15,000 wolves may be distributed throughout the country. Wolf conservationists in China face many of the same problems as conservationists in other parts of the world, i.e. wolves are blood-thirsty killers. Education of the public as well as intense gun control measures have helped curb human-caused wolf mortality rates. However, the steady increase in road-building, construction and population sprawl, most especially since the early 1980s, have taken their toll upon the land and upon all of China's endangered species.

In early 2001, the worst winter in 50 years drove packs of wolves out of the mountains in

the far west region of Islamic Xinjiang. These wolf packs proceeded to the plains where livestock grazed. According to news reports, starving, freezing wolves supposedly ate 1,500 sheep in one prefecture alone. Wolves attacked endangered antelope in the Kalamaili Mountain Nature Preserve.

Also in 2001, the Chinese State Forestry Administration released their conclusions after a five-year study in Hunan Province. Chinese experts warned that wolves, jackals and roes are becoming extinct there, chiefly due to environmental deterioration. Over 2,800 forestry experts and technicians had been consulted. The last time a wolf and roe were seen was in 2000 and a jackal has not been seen since 1993.

According to news reports in late 2002, wolves began attacking herdsmen's flocks in the Badain Jaran desert. The Badain Jaran is the second largest desert in China and covers an area of 47,000 square kilometers. It is located in the west of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. The desert was once home to many animals, including wolves, hawks, foxes, wild geese and swans, but most vanished because of over-hunting.

The herdsmen are using non-lethal measures to scare wolves away. These include lighting torches and setting off firecrackers. Some herdsmen also ride their motorcycles at the packs to drive them off.

The local government suggests herdsmen keep their sheep together instead of having many small, separate flocks. Wolves are currently under second-class state protection in China. A series of laws in the 1990s were also passed to ban hunting. Ecologists see the re-emergence of wolves in the Badain Jaran and its surroundings as a sign of an improving environment. Wolf numbers have increased sharply which indicates that the local ecological system is now returning to normal.

A research fellow with the Institute of Grasslands at China's Academy of Agricultural Sciences stated the thriving wolves could be attributed to the restored food chain. Yuan Qing also stated that the restoration of many different plants was the key, with wolves culminating as the chief predator. There appears to be more plants due to higher rainfall in the area.

This successful desertification control and ecological restoration could also mean an end to the severe annual sandstorms that previously originated in Inner Mongolia and plague Beijing.

In early 2003, organized hunts were being considered due to what the local herdsmen felt were high livestock losses to them. Additional studies are needed to determine how many wolves can be killed without destabilizing the population.

CANIS LUPUS HODOPHILAX IN JAPAN

The extinct Japanese wolf of the Hondo Islands (consisting of Hoshu, Siloku and Kyushu) is thought to have migrated there in the late Pleistocene era from the northern territories. They then became isolated. This island isolation may account for their smaller size and morphological change of the skull when compared to *Canis lupus lupus*. It is taxonomically considered to be a distinctive subspecies.





CHINA AND JAPAN



Although it was the size of a small dog, human fear and misunderstanding caused it to be elevated to the realm of a god-like creature. It was both feared and revered. Throughout its history, it had many common names such as okami (Great God), magami (True God) yama no kami (Mountain God) and the Howling God.

The Hondo Islands consist of rugged and heavily forested mountains. *Canis lupus hodophilax* adapted to its environment, freely roaming the remote mountain areas.

Its coat was short, dense and usually ash-gray, tinged with white, russet and brown. Its length would rarely exceed 104 cm (41 inches) and it had a thin tail which measured 30 cm (12 inches) on average. Its legs were also extraordinarily short for a wolf. These characteristics would lead biologists to believe that the *hodophilax* may have been closer to a wild dog rather than a wolf.

The aboriginal Japanese, the Ainu, named this wolf the Howling God. According to historical reports, it would howl for hours, the mournful wails emanating from the bleak and remote mountain range. These simple people could only imagine that the creature held great powers. It was a mystical and powerful creature to them, although they hunted the tiny wolf with poisoned arrows.

On one hand, it was revered and perceived as a protector while also being feared and loathed. One legend, The Quiver of the Mountain Spirit, tells of a blind lute player who was lost on a mountain. He is guided down the mountain by what he believes to be a hunter. Upon arriving safely at a village, he later discovers that it was a tiny wolf.

The mountain people would use this wolf's skull as a charm to chase away demons. Shrines were built to encourage its protective power. Ancient legends from the Tono District in northeastern Japan recount the Japanese wolf as a "vicious and dreadful thing to meet." They supposedly devoured horses and brought ill fortune to homes if encountered.

This ambivalence about the tiny wolf was most prevalent in the stories of a wolf following travelers. Some people believed they should not turn to look upon the wolf until they reached a village or else they would be attacked. Others believed the wolf would protect them on these roads.

Fear soon overcame the human inhabitants and with the introduction to the populace of firearms, the tiny wolf was hunted to extinction. Although the real threat was minor, the perceived threat overwhelmed its reproductive patterns. This wolf was mostly hunted for its coat.

As the human population increased in Japan, so did deforestation and farming. Because Japan has one of the highest population densities in the world, it could not hope to sustain a free-ranging, wild wolf population as well.

By the end of the 19th century, the Japanese government offered bounties on the tiny wolf. Local governments paid 7 yen (currently this would be US .06 and EUR .048) for a wolf between 1878-82 and 10 yen after 1888.

Together with an epidemic of canine

distemper, these bounties helped the *hodophilax* towards extinction. It is believed that the last Japanese wolf was killed in 1905 near Washikaguchi on Honshu.

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Alaska's Denali National Park

by Lise Donnez

Photos: Pierre Zuppiroli and Lise Donnez

This is an account of a trek by *Pierre Zuppiroli* and *Lise Donnez* deep into Alaska's Denali National park from July 15th to 30th last year. The original article was written by *Lise Donnez* for the French publication *La Gazette des Grands Predateurs*, which has kindly authorised reproduction in *Wolf Print*. Translation is by *Gwynne Power*.



Mask for the Inuits' "Wolf Dance" (seen at the Anchorage Museum).

The Denali National Park & Preserve, a wonderfully remote wilderness some 450 km north of the port of Anchorage, extends over 24,238 km². It came into being by act of Congress in 1917 due to the energy and drive of Charles Sheldon, an enthusiastic hunter, as a result of his mounting concern over the decline in numbers of Dall sheep in the region, though laws protecting this creature only came into being in 1921. At this time the area was just 8,400 km² and it went under the name of Mount McKinley National Park, after the mountain it encompasses that, at 6,194 metres, is the highest in the United States.



Dall sheep

At this time Harry Karsten, a determined and incorruptible man, became head ranger of the park and established a network of huts designed to help counter persistent poaching. Here was a man ready to resort to violence to protect the conservation dream if words of warning proved insufficient.

Expansion to its present extent came in 1980 when it took on the name Denali, or 'the great one' in the local Inupiat language. Today more than a million people visit the park, 80% of them on the bus that runs up and down the 210 km-long Park Highway in the four months of summer when it is passable by motor vehicle. But of these only 1% venture more than 1.6 km from the road, so those who do quickly leave behind any human contact.

During the visitor season the park deploys 200 rangers and engages a further 200 support staff (bus drivers, receptionists in the

Visitors' Centre, etc), all motivated by the need to keep the wildlife and the habitat intact under the slogan *Keep the Wildlife Wild*.

The renowned Visitor Center, nerve centre of the park and the essential starting point for anyone wishing to venture into the *back country* as a permit must be issued. The park is divided into 43 sectors and on any day only 12 permits are issued for a given sector and sometimes as few as two. This ensures that the natural inhabitants reign supreme. So one is virtually on one's own without paths, signposts and in highly uncertain meteorological conditions: it snows at least one day a month even through the summer!

There is absolute protection for all wildlife from hunters in the original 8,400 km² of the park, but the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) recognised that the needs of those living within the wider boundaries before their annexation should be respected since their predatory interaction with certain creatures in a habitat natural to them as well as the wildlife can be essential to their survival.

Hunting of wolves is permitted in the wider zone from mid-August through to April, while their trapping is allowed from November to March. Each inhabitant has the right to hunt 10 wolves while there is no limit on the numbers trapped. If this seems harsh on the wolves its effect on their population is



Welcome to Alaska! A big grey wolf wishes you welcome as you arrive at Anchorage Airport

minimal, an estimated 2%, since there are so few human inhabitants within the park's boundaries.

The Alaska Range massif lies between the Arctic and sub-Arctic belt where climatic conditions are particularly harsh. The growth period for vegetation is a mere three months and there is very little sunlight due to the oblique angle of sunrays so far from the equator. The average temperature for the hottest month is just 10 to 15 degrees C. In winter the trees can draw no sustenance from the soil as we are in the permafrost zone, meaning the soil remains frozen even in summer, so their survival depends on sunlight, absent during the winter months – eight months of virtual night. At snowmelt the water remains on the surface, rendering some lands swampy through the summer.

Wooded zones of any density are well within the park, while the majority of the taiga is composed of well spaced conifers, which helps greatly in wildlife observation. There are relatively few species, (*Picea glauca*, *Picea mariana*), (*Betula papyrifera*). In winter the taiga is dormant. It is a hardy vegetal system that lives on very little and has a very low level of fertility. Animal life is meagre.

The tundra is characterised by sparse vegetal growth, grasses, moss and lichen, punctuated by the occasional dwarf tree – silver birch and alder (*Betula glandulosa* and *Alnus crispa*) and willow (*Salix alaxensis*, *Abrusculoides*). It is in areas like this that one can easily come across a Grizzly bear. The trees are just about tall enough to cover their backs. In dry tundra we come across plants like *Vaccinium Spp.*, *Empetrum nigrum* and *Ledum Spp.*

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

They take nature extremely seriously in Denali. From its frontiers through the heartland of this park the rangers have no hesitation in strictly enforcing the rules. One of the main reasons for not creating paths through the wilderness, apart from the destructive effects on vegetation, is that routes created to facilitate human mobility could be taken up by wild creatures, who may find traces, such as scraps of food, left by humans. Use of the paths could become habit-forming for animals and create an undesirable association with humankind. Visitors may take nothing from the park, so we saw several trophies abandoned in the wild.

The woodlands themselves have a particular role to play, since they provide essential minerals for various creatures passing through them. This means strictly no paths, no fires, no signs and only the official bus is allowed to use the Park Highway during the accessible summer months. In winter, dogs pull the rangers' sleighs to provide greater mobility with the minimum intrusion on the habitat. The animals face temperatures falling to 40 degrees C, even 50 C below zero and have to function in almost total darkness 24/24. Occasionally, in the interests of research, biologists and other interested scientists take their chances with ski-equipped planes, usually in very early spring.

GRIZZLIES

The name Grizzly – brown bear (*Ursus Arctos*) – comes from 'greying'. In fact it is not brown at all, more grey, maroon, white and orange in highly variable proportions. If in the distance you see a mobile glistening orange shape it is very likely a Grizzly. There are from 250 to 400 in the park, along with a similar number of Black Bears (*Ursus Americanus*), the latter to be found in their hundreds of thousands across the United States.

These two bears share a very different image in the United States. The Black Bear is considered something of a nuisance, more appreciated for the quality of its meat, which its consumers pronounce delicious. In contrast the Grizzly enjoys total protection, both in Alaska and the rest of the United States, known as the Lower 48, as Alaska was the 49th state to enter the Union. Hawaii is of course the 50th. Harming a Grizzly could be an expensive folly, with fines of up to \$200,000 for the culprit. The Grizzlies of Denali are 80% herbivores, weighing an average 150kg, while those on the Alaskan coastline, the magnificent Kodiak Brown Bear tip the scales at an average 700kg, regaling themselves on salmon during the summer months.



Ground squirrel - frequent and easy food for Grizzly bears

The Grizzlies of Denali need 40,000 calories a day to survive, so they consume enormous quantities of willow, roots and bilberries and whatever else is available to stock up for winter. In total they have a remarkably varied diet of some 200 vegetal species.



The famous Bear Flower (*Boykinia richardsonii*: Saxifragaceae) that the Grizzly loves.

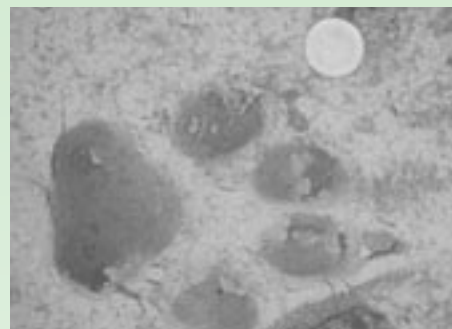
The female Grizzly will often have two, or even three cubs, which remain with her for three summers, by which time she is fertile again and the cubs are left to fend for themselves to make room for a fresh set of cubs that she delivers in her lair in January or February. A promiscuous creature, she offers herself to several males in her period in season, May, June and July. This means that she can give birth to cubs by different fathers in her 235-day gestation period. Overall, the average life expectancy is some 25 years, while some survive until 30.

The average male will command a territory of some 70Km², the female half that. On occasion these areas will overlap, obviously most frequently at mating time.

WOLVES

From 1986 to 1994 David Mech conducted a study of 147 wolves fitted with radio collars. It is said that the wolves of Denali are the least disturbed in the world, yet paradoxically the most photographed. Suffice to type in 'Wolves of Denali' on an Internet search engine and page on page of pictures with an abundance of accompanying information will unfold.

Wandering through the wilderness area we were able to witness just how free from molestation the wolves are. There are about 100 of them, living in 10 to 15 packs, each of five to seven individuals. When last summer the dens of the Toklat River and Savage River packs were discovered by Rangers they were immediately put off-limits to visitors. The Toklat River pack has four adults and four pups: the Savage River pack five of each generation. Among these animals, the highest cause of unnatural death, some 39%, is conflict between packs, usually over territorial rights.



Denali wolf paw print - a moment of great discovery!

The wolves of Denali are inveterate travellers. Some have been spotted up to 700 km from their initial habitat, while the average trek is 133 km, with each pack enjoying a territory of some 1,020 km².

The caribou provides the greatest source of nourishment for these packs, some 36% of their diet, 19% of them calves, 27% moose (12% calves), 14% beavers and 2% Dall sheep. Among the remaining 21%, the arctic squirrel (*Spermophilus undulatus*) is amazingly important in the wolf's dietary balance. This delightful creature, abundant at all times of year, has far too enquiring a mind for its own good, and falls ready prey to wolves as well as providing a vital energy boost to the Grizzly.



A female moose we discovered near the Visitor Center! She had two little calves. You normally learn that, "If you see a moose, run!", but this one was quite nice. Apparently she spends her summer near the visitor center every year with her little ones as she feels safer there than in the wild back country.....notice that she wears a radio collar.

Hunting the moose is a dangerous undertaking. This striking beast, that could have walked straight out of pre-history, forms a redoubtable opponent, even for a fit and vibrant pack of wolves. Weighing an average 400 kg, one blow from a flying hoof or sweep of antlers, these alone weighing some 50 kg, could bring instant death to a wolf. Much thought precedes an attack on a moose. The first exploratory step is to surround, at which point we reach the moment of truth. The wolves weigh up their objective, deciding whether it is worth a try. If the moose stands its ground, meeting the gaze of the Alpha of the pack, it will usually stare it down and it will survive. To turn and run is to display weakness and the pack will scent a kill. Even so it is no easy victim, and a moose hunt can take days before it is brought to ground and its death.



Caribou (friendly!) we meet on our track!

As for the caribou, they migrate south in winter, leaving the wolves' prey range limited and they can go hungry for weeks. The bear's natural solution is to hibernate.

But spring brings difficulties of its own as bear and cubs emerge from their den in urgent need for food. At times like these it is not particularly unusual to see bear and wolf settle to share a meal. If there is confrontation over the prey the Grizzly usually carries the day, but if each side sees mutual advantage, after a great deal of grunting and snarling, they may decide to devour the downed beast in harmony. We attended a lecture by American biologist Dr Gordon Haber, a specialist in wolf behaviour, who showed some astonishing slides of such scenes.

This trip was the first time we actually came face-to-face with a Grizzly. We had a thorough sense of being out of place. We learned that in the eyes of the Grizzly we do not amount to much, and they are noted for tolerance of encroachment on their domain. In all the years since the park's foundation in 1917 there is no recorded case of a human killed by one of these creatures. The reason is simple. They just do not see humankind as prey. They don't associate us with a square meal.

In case of an encounter Rangers strongly recommend the salutation 'Hey Bear', uttered loud, friendly and clear. This is to alert the creature to the human presence and to ensure that it does not react adversely out of surprise reflex.

Another image that will long remain with us was the mid-afternoon encounter with two dominant wolves, a black male and a grey female, stripping the carcass of a caribou, unhurriedly easing their hunger. They kept a wary eye on us but there was no hint of aggression and they were in no way distracted from their repast. Nor was there any hint of their yielding their territory.

One voracious eater, a wolverine, did disappear after noticing our presence. But only after we had enjoyed the opportunity of watching from a ridge we were wandering along. The sighting lasted some 30 minutes. Another sighting to live long in the memory.

The lynx (*Lynx Canadensis*) has been rarely seen in recent years as its existence is closely intertwined with its principal prey, the American hare (*Lepus Americanus*). This hare population fluctuates wildly in the park and with it the lynx's. When the hare population is at its lowest, the lynx has been known to attack hoofed creatures as large as the Dall sheep, but with scant success.

MASS TOURISM AND PRESERVATION OF THE FAUNA

Alaska has experienced a range of economic phenomena in its modern history. From the Gold Rush through industrial salmon fishing to the exploitation of oil and gas, this vast state is now entering the age of mass tourism. With most visitors from 'the lower 48' the influx is making tourism Alaska's principal economic resource.

Above we described The Denali National Park & Preserve as the world's ultimate wilderness, a place where virtually nothing has been altered from its natural state by the hand of humankind. The park extends over such a huge area that it is possible to enjoy that unique experience of walking for day on day without even a hint of human contact.

This park is an integral part of American history and culture and is one of those stark contradictions in which the USA abounds. Though famous internationally as the world's greatest polluters, the range of their national parks is unparalleled and their administration exemplary.

All without exception place the preservation of wild fauna at the top of their priorities. For example, three years ago a camping site was closed in one park because

it had proved too great an attraction for a wolf pack, risking corruption of the wolf way of life through too great contact with humans. Americans are also imbued with a desire to share and educate: their educational aids and tools are as well thought through as they are brilliant to observe, and seemingly every Ranger is a natural and enthusiastic communicator.

Let us all hope that this policy of 'priority to wild life', entrenched for more than a century, survives for longer into the future.

As Denali Ranger Patrick Gamman says: "The national parks will endure as long as we go on believing in their existence".



Patrick Gamman, Ranger at Denali National Park at an outdoor evening conference on the Wolves of Denali.

Pierre Zuppiroli is a French mountain guide. He takes clients around the world to visit and discover special habitats and interact with the local populations. Pierre is on the advisory council of FERUS, France's largest wolf, bear and lynx conservation association. By education Pierre is an agricultural expert.

Lise Donnez, born in Denmark and settled in France 22 years ago, is a senior director in one of the world's largest software companies. She has always been passionate about wolves and devotes all her free time and energy to their cause. Lise serves on FERUS board as the national Wolf Coordinator.

Pierre and Lise live in Haute-Savoie in the French Alps. Together they enjoy spending intense moments in nature. Eager to share their experiences, Pierre & Lise's personal study trips often result in articles published in FERUS' quarterly magazine "La Gazette des Grands Predateurs".

Back to the Future: A VISIT TO BULGARIA

by Denise Taylor

Photos: Alex Hampson and Denise Taylor

EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION

Vucho is one of two captive wolves rescued from zoos by the Balkani Wildlife Society. Just under a year old, Vucho is an ambassador wolf whose role is to try and change the negative perceptions of wolves in Bulgaria. Balkan, a mature wolf, has not been socialised with humans, but does now enjoy much better living conditions at the Balkani Wildlife Society project.

In this region in the Pirin mountains, many of the children's fathers are hunters who see wild wolves as a threat, and who often exaggerate the size of the 'beasts' they kill. This negative perception is perpetuated by the media, and a dead wolf still carries a bounty. Despite the prevalent negative attitudes, the children at both schools we visited seemed unperturbed at seeing a wild wolf, and were not at all nervous at seeing a 'ravaging beast' which, in fact, turned out

to be a very playful and skittish young wolf who was eager to lick as many faces as he could. At the UKWCT our school visits are highly regulated and strictly controlled. Risk assessments are carried out prior to any visits, and we always have at least two handlers per wolf when they are interacting with the children. In Bulgaria there were no such restraints or controls. Children crowded excitedly round Vucho, and although he was very nervous at first, he soon relaxed and was keen to return the greetings.

The trip to Bulgaria was organised as part of my own research in wolf conservation education which is an integral part of my work with the UKWCT and E4C (Education for Conservation), an organisation that has arisen from my conservation research and work. I have corresponded with Elena Tsingarska, a biologist with the Balkani

Wildlife Society, for a number of years, and we finally met in Banff last September at the World Wolf Congress. Elena has been undertaking research as a wolf biologist for a number of years, but also realises the importance of education. She and her husband, Sider Sedefchev, have been responsible for developing and providing an educational programme which has been delivered to at least 9,000 children throughout the two regions of the Pirin mountains and Kraishte. This has included over 9,000 workbooks and posters, which have been painstakingly illustrated by Sider (who is also an artist as well as an ardent conservationist), photographic exhibitions, and seminars and workshops. The workbooks are fun for the children to complete and at the same time they deliver an educational message about wildlife in Bulgaria, biodiversity and conservation.





As well as reaching out to the schools, Elena also has contact with zoos, hunting organisations and local politicians. Within an hour of the plane touching down in Sofia my colleague, Alex, and I were whisked off to visit the city zoo. Elena was due to give a slide presentation about wolves and their conservation. We were met by Katarina, the Zoo's Environmental Education Centre Manager, who is also a keen ornithologist. A group of children and their parents listened intently to Elena's presentation before going outside to take part in a wolf conservation game.

Although still battling against the tide with a lack of legislation to protect wolves, and prevalent negative attitudes, the hard work being carried out is having a positive effect. There is a definite sense of interest and curiosity being aroused in all sectors of the community, even those opposed to large carnivores. There is also an underlying feeling that the political climate which, although still resistant to conservation issues, is now starting slowly to change. Elena is now being asked to join in meetings that would previously have demonstrated hostility to her work.

VLAHI

One of the Balkani Wildlife Society's field centres is in Vlahi (pronounced Vlaki) in the Pirin Mountains, a small village which because of their opposition to Communism was overlooked by the Communist regime. Nothing has changed in the village for decades, if not centuries. There is no running water, and the road up into the village is a dirt track, pitted with holes and frequently dotted with rocks and boulders. Villagers still live and work in traditional ways, and horses and carts are a common sight.

We arrived after dark, and the fact that we had to collect a four-wheel drive vehicle from the town at the base of the mountain



to complete our journey gave us some indication of what was in store for us. The ride up to the village was indeed very bumpy, and it was quite scary not being able to see whether or not there were any sheer drops on either side of the car as we made our way up the mountain.

We woke the next day to a rural idyll. The sound of sheep and goats bleating and their bells clanking, birdsong, the cockerel crowing, and the dogs barking. These are no ordinary dogs. Known as Karakachan dogs, they are a breed that for centuries has been used for livestock protection, and are believed to be descended from the shepherd dogs of the ancient Thracians. The advent of Communism saw the near-dying out of the Karakachan breeds of dogs, sheep and horses after livestock was taken and redistributed among co-operative farms, leaving livestock owners, some of whom previously had thousands of heads of sheep, with just half a dozen if they were lucky. Such large flocks required many dogs for protection, and now with no flocks, the dogs were redundant and their owners had lost the livelihood and the means to continue feeding them. The dogs were left to fend for themselves, and most of them did not survive the transition.

In an attempt to resurrect the breed, the Bulgarian Biodiversity Preservation Society - Semperviva, run by Elena's artist husband, Sider, and his colleagues are breeding Karakachan dogs and distributing breeding pairs to farmers to protect livestock. When we arrived at the house in Vlahi, they had fifteen dogs that were part of the breeding programme. A further 18 dogs were kept at a base in Pernick. Each day during our stay the eight working dogs would accompany the shepherds as they took the sheep and goats up to the first stage of mountain pasture. Six accompany the sheep, and two accompany the goat herd.



There are two shepherds at the project, Yanko Mihov and Georgi Dimitrov, whose son Todor, is a colleague of Sider's and closely involved with the project. I spent some time watching Yanko milking the goats one morning, and when we went back into the house, he immediately sieved the milk and poured some into a glass for me to drink. It was sweet, warm, and very delicious. Nothing at all like the processed goat's milk available in the UK. The cheese has a similar creamy, sweet flavour which was very moreish, and with only a slight tang. Yanko was responsible for shepherding the sheep each day, while Georgi tended the goats. As the summer progresses the sheep will be taken further up into the mountains in stages until they finally reach the Alpine region, where they will pasture for the rest of the summer.

The small farmhouse we stayed at in Vlahi was built by BBPS - Semperviva (namely Sider and his brother with the help of their father and other friends and colleagues), and which they now share with Balkani Wildlife Society. Another building has also been purchased in the village which is to be converted into an Education and Tourism Centre. The building was previously an old stable block, and is now derelict. BBPS - Semperviva and Balkani are currently trying to secure funding to redevelop the building to attract visitors to the area. Proposals are being discussed for Vlahi to become the gateway to the national park higher in the mountains, and the planned centre would be an ideal starting point for tourists. The Education Centre would be open to schools, organisations and other visitors to learn about the biodiversity and conservation in the region. Elena sees Vucho playing a very important ambassadorial role in helping to educate visiting schoolchildren and adults, who will have the opportunity to meet a real wolf and learn that they are not the





enormous and vicious beasts they are portrayed to be in the Bulgarian media.

TRACKING WILD WOLVES

Two days into our stay, it was time to head higher into the Pirin mountain. After 10 years of working in wolf conservation, at last I was tracking wolves in the wild. The snows had almost melted, and the ground was soft and muddy; good conditions to track wolves. Four of us set out early in the morning: Elena, Sarah Jordaan (a volunteer from Canada who is studying Environmental Modelling at the University of Calgary), Alex and me. Sarah and Alex took one route and Elena and I set off in the opposite direction.

Elena and her colleagues are having to use this method of tracking wolves until they manage to radio collar some of the wolves roaming the Pirin mountains. So far, they have been very elusive and have managed to avoid the trap lines that have been set. The traps comprise modified leghold traps and the team go to great lengths to make sure that the area is untainted by human scent. The traps are checked daily, and horses are often used to get close to the traps to see if any wolves have been caught. Scent-masking techniques are also used to disguise human smells which might deter the wolves from entering that particular area. One wolf was caught in the trap recently, but managed to escape, much to the dismay of Elena who would find it easier to collate more data with the advantages radio telemetry provides to track wolves and their packs.

Elena and I carried on walking up the trail, and it wasn't long before we came across some canid tracks, but these were on a part of the trail frequented by locals and their dogs so the tracks could have belonged to a dog, and there weren't enough prints in the mud to study the gait of the animal.

A little further on, Elena suddenly stopped. A black and yellow salamander



lay very still on the track in front of us. For me, this was an exciting start to the tracking ahead.

Our next set of canine tracks did turn out to be those of a wolf, and Elena explained the characteristic signs. The discovery of scat further along the trail containing wild boar hairs and part of a boar's hoof confirmed that we were indeed following wolf tracks.

We followed the tracks for quite some time. The wolf had walked with purpose all the way up the mountain trail. All along the trail there were also tracks from roe deer, badgers, wild boar, badgers and wild cat, and at a couple of points, the tracks were criss-crossed with those of another wolf.

As a biologist, Elena is interested in what the wolves eat, and so has the unpleasant task of scooping up wolf scat whenever she finds any, which is then later analysed. She also makes a record of where both the tracks and the scat were found using a hand-held Global Positioning Satellite system. All these data help to provide a detailed picture of wild wolves, their behaviour and how they utilise their territory.

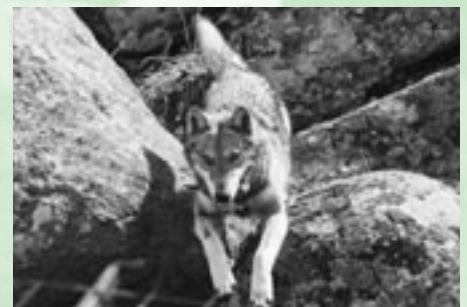
Local hunters are now becoming used to seeing Elena and her colleagues. After the tracking we made our way back to the car, and were driving back down the mountain to Vlahi, when we came across a hunter passing the time of day with one of the mountain residents. They hailed us down, and exchanged greetings with Elena. The conversation sounded lively, and after a while the hunter got into the car with us. Elena explained that he had asked for a lift back down to the village. She carried on talking to the hunter, and it was clear that some lively banter was being exchanged. Later she told us that they had been talking about the wolf project, and the rumours going round that Elena and her colleagues were releasing their captive wolves into the wild. The exchange



had been friendly, however, and Elena was not too worried by such rumours. She said that recently the hunters had been expressing greater curiosity about the results of her research, and at a photo exhibition in one of the towns one hunter had been heard exclaiming how beautiful he thought wolves actually are.

WALK WITH A WOLF

On our final day in the Pirin Mountains we had the privilege of going out on a walk with Vucho. As with our own wolves at the UK Wolf Conservation Trust, I expected Vucho to be on a leash as we took him for a walk in the beautiful mountain region. Elena's biologist colleague, Alexandar Dutsov, had gone to let Vucho out of his enclosure and I took this opportunity to tighten the laces on my boots which had become loose. I had my foot resting on a boulder, with my back to the enclosure. All of a sudden I was being pounced on by a very playful, but nevertheless almost fully grown, wolf. As my colleagues at the UKWCT will tell you, I am currently a little wary around loose wolves, having recently been on the receiving end of two of our own wolves' (Duma and Dakota) boisterous, but damaging playfulness (one wrecked cotton cardigan, a pair of shoes and a couple of good scars now bear testament to this). I'm glad that I didn't have the time with Vucho to become nervous around him. It was straight into the fray and I simply had to let him know I wasn't going to put up with him jumping all over me. Once we'd established that I wasn't that easy a target, more from my own perspective than Vucho's I guess, then we set off up the mountain-side. Or rather the men strode off, and I did my best to keep up with them. There were four of us accompanying Vucho: Alexandar, Alex (my colleague) and Geoffrey Gersie, another volunteer who had come from Holland to spend a month at the project.





The three men were all six foot tall and with long strides to match. All were also reasonably fit, especially Alexandar who spends a great deal of time tramping through the mountains in search of the elusive creatures he studies. All five foot four inches of me were now feeling the constraints of a sedentary lifestyle as I tried to keep up. Vucho seemed concerned that I would be left behind and kept coming back to check on me, and to wait for me to catch up. Elena later said he was trying to "keep his pack together".

It was refreshing experience walking with a wolf that was free to run around wherever he chose to, which as it happened was mostly around us. He playfully tried to trip biologist Alexandar up on several occasions, spent some time "testing" my colleague Alex and me. And there was one point where he started stalking a group of wild Karakachan horses, but thankfully he did come back to us after Alexandar started to howl to him.

We managed to take some excellent photographs of Vucho on his walk, and later, looking at them, I was struck by how much he blended in perfectly against the

background. It is easy to appreciate how wolves blend into a forest background, but on this occasion we were out on open ground and walking among boulders.

BBPS – Semperviva and the Balkani Wildlife Society are undertaking excellent work. The project to build the new centre is an exciting one, and having seen what both organisations have achieved so far, I think the Education and Tourism Centre will soon be a successful addition to their project. Bulgaria is a beautiful land with one of the highest levels of biodiversity in Europe. Traditions which have been practised for centuries are still evident, and more importantly, are proving to be just as successful as they have always been, demonstrating that progress isn't always progress. Alex and I stepped back in time to a place that is the future of wildlife conservation in Bulgaria.

And although there is a lot of serious work being accomplished, the one thing that shines through it all, is the great sense of fun to be had working in conservation. Bulgaria and its people now have a special place in my heart, and I'm looking forward to many future visits to Vlahi.

The UKWCT has previously donated funds to the Balkani Wildlife Society for the purchase of Karakachan dogs. Breeding pairs of pups are given to farmers who raise them to provide livestock protection, with the aim of increasing tolerance towards wolves and other predators.

One of the aims of the project is to renovate the building that has been purchased in Vlahi, and develop this into an Education Centre and a Tourism Centre. It is proposed that Vlahi be the "gateway" for visitors to the Pirin Mountains. Elena, Sider and their colleagues are in the process of fundraising to build and develop the centre as well as continuing to raise funds for the livestock protection programme.

If you would like to donate money to this worthwhile project, then please contact the Balkani Wildlife Society directly, or send your donations to the UKWCT, and we will forward these on.

Elena Tsingarska
The Balkani Wildlife Society
Dragan Tzankov Blvd.8,
1164 Sofia
Bulgaria



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