

The magazine of The UK Wolf Conservation Trust, published quarterly

WolfPrint

Issue 31 Summer 2007



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

Editorial



The human impact on wolves and their conservation is a prominent theme in one guise or another in this issue, from the "Wolf Man" who has attempted to be accepted by his captive pack as a wolf rather than as a human (page 14), to the fate of wolves in both Bulgaria (page 16) and Poland (page 8) as a result of being hunted. This highlights the fact that today, there are many diverse groups of people who are affected by – and who have an effect upon – wolf populations throughout the world: Hunters, farmers, biologists, conservationists, rural communities, and so on. Each group often has a different worldview or perspective on the wolf, which largely depends upon where they live, the culture they were brought up in, and sometimes the economic necessities which have influenced wildlife management policies down the years.

On page 13, we bring you an update on the situation in Albania, where a farmer caught a wild wolf, and in order to feed it (or so the story goes), he put a live donkey in with the wolf. Rather than eat the donkey, the wolf seemed to befriend it. This is yet another example of human intervention getting things completely wrong: This case made the international media, and we received numerous emails about the plight of both animals. Various petitions and campaigns were launched to save them, and the story has certainly stirred up a lot of emotions about how we treat animals. I'm sure our Ethos columnist, Bill Lynn, will have something to say about this when he returns to his usual spot in Wolf Print in the autumn issue.

Recently, assistant editor, Chris Senior, and I visited Bulgaria to see the progress being made on the Large Carnivore Education Centre, which is nearing completion. The Centre saw its first phase of opening in early May, and is a great example of human intervention at its most positive, in helping to educate people from all walks of life as to the true nature of large predators and what can be done to foster co-existence with them. As Bulgaria is one of the projects which the UKWCT supports on a long-term basis, we will bring you regular updates on progress over there. The Centre is due to be fully opened in September this year.

Rolf Peterson has been a wolf researcher and conservationist for many years, and has studied the wolves of Isle Royale since the 1970s, building a picture of the predator-prey dynamics that have evolved in this unique island situation for wolves. Peterson and his colleagues have recently produced their annual report, and you will find a summary of this on page 10. Again, this highlights how wolves can also shape the destiny of humans, as these dedicated researchers devote a lifetime to researching these much maligned creatures, in order to give the world a much more accurate picture of the true nature of the wolf, its ecology, and its behaviours.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue.

DTaylor

Wolf Print – Issue 32

Reintroduction, Restoration and Recovery

The next issue of Wolf Print will have the theme of Reintroduction, Restoration and Recovery, and which is also the theme of the UKWCT Seminar on 30 September 2007. (See the advert on Page 9) for further details).

Reintroduction and restoration are key issues in the recovery of wolf populations throughout the world. We will bring you updates and in-depth features on projects that have enjoyed success in reintroducing wolves and other species, and how this has affected landscapes, habitats and ecosystems.

A topic which crops up continually when we speak to people about wolves is the potential reintroduction to Scotland. We will discuss this issue in some detail, and what it will mean to the British landscape and its inhabitants (both human and other wildlife species).

If you would like to put your view or comments forward regarding these issues, then please write to me: The Editor, Wolf Print Magazine, UKWCT, Butler's Farm, Beenham, Reading RG7 5NT.

FRONT COVER PHOTO: CHRIS SENIOR



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



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Crossing the boundaries



Humans are not wolves!



Building the future in Bulgaria



WOLVES

W of the WORLD ...

EUROPE

France

French wolf cull, 2007/8

10th May

In what's becoming an annual event, France has given authorisation for six wolves to be culled in the coming year in its Alpine départements. The cull aims to relieve the pressure on farmers, who assert wolves are decimating their livelihoods, but the culls are fiercely opposed by conservationists who argue that removing six wolves won't achieve anything.

There are some safeguards built into the system though: Wolves will still be fully protected in national parks, and when a wolf is shot, no more can be killed for another 24 hours. Unlike previous years, however, there are no restrictions on the gender of the wolves killed. Shooting a wolf is meant as a last resort when all other efforts to protect livestock have failed.

Source:

by French Government:
<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WA/spad/UnTexteDeJor?numjo=DEVN0752004A>

http://www.chien.com/Echos/actua.php?id_actua=1004&from=0

Villagers rally to save injured wolf

13th June

A mature female wolf, 6 or 7 years old, collapsed in a remote village in the French Alps on the 11th June. She was severely wounded, with torn muscles (especially on the legs) and a damaged spine. The villagers decided unanimously to try and save the injured predator.

Rangers from the Mercantour National Park were called in to capture the wolf, believed to be the first ever caught alive in France. Florent Favier, one of the rangers, says she's 99% certain that the wounds were sustained in a fight with other wolves. There are seven or eight packs nearby, stretching from the park into Italy.

The veterinary surgeon treating the wolf says that if she survives for a week, then she'll have a good chance of pulling through.

The events mark a change from the recent spate of poisonings in the Haute-Alpes region of France, where wolves are feared by many. The village has a special tie with wolves though, for it was nearly 25 years ago that the first wolves returning to France were spotted here.

Source:

Nice-Matin, 13th June.

http://www.nice.maville.com/Une-louve-blessee-capturee-lundi-a-Mollieres/re/actudet/actu_dep-415709----_actu.html

Italy

Wolves return to Granda - 5 packs studied

20 June 2007

Biologists have been monitoring several packs of wolves in the Granda region of the Italian Alps.

A study has been ongoing into the habits of the wolf population, looking at their diet, movement and predation on livestock. The conclusion is that attacks are not increasing, despite local fears.

Wolves were extirpated in the region but started reappearing in notable numbers in the late 80s. There were sporadic sightings through the 1970s, leading to rumours that they'd been reintroduced deliberately to the area.

The wolf population has flourished as people leave the mountains for the cities, along with the fact wolves are now protected by Italian law: Wolf packs normally comprise between 3 and 6 wolves, although in the great National Parks in the United States, a pack of more than 30 wolves was recorded. Each pack controls its own territory (up to 250 square km) and defends it from other wolves. In order to stop the pack getting too large, young wolves disperse from it.

The original writer of this report saw a wolf in broad daylight on a road outside Nucetto, but the wolf soon left. Nonetheless, it was hard to distinguish it as a wolf at first glance.

There are a few distinguishing features of the wolves. A distinctive white mark on the muzzle, black bands on the front legs, and a black tip to the tail. The weight varies from 25 to 35kg, a marked difference from the American wolf often seen in documentaries - their weight can reach 60kg. The diet of the Alpine wolf comprises mostly of chamois and roe deer, with only 10% of their prey being livestock in summer pasture.

The farmers of the Piemonte region have been suffering attacks on their cattle, blamed on the wolf but often caused by dogs. Dogs and wolves attack differently and differ in the way they eat their prey: A wolf kills with a bite to the neck and takes the smaller animals of the herd, and will enter a carcass through the abdomen and remove the stomach. If it's not disturbed, it will eat almost the entire animal.

The dog, by comparison, is not a skilled hunter like the wolf. The bites will be scattered and they may not eat the whole animal. Moreover, it's likely they'll kill more animals per attack than wolves will. Italy doesn't have feral packs of dogs, rather they're animals which have run away from owners or tourists.

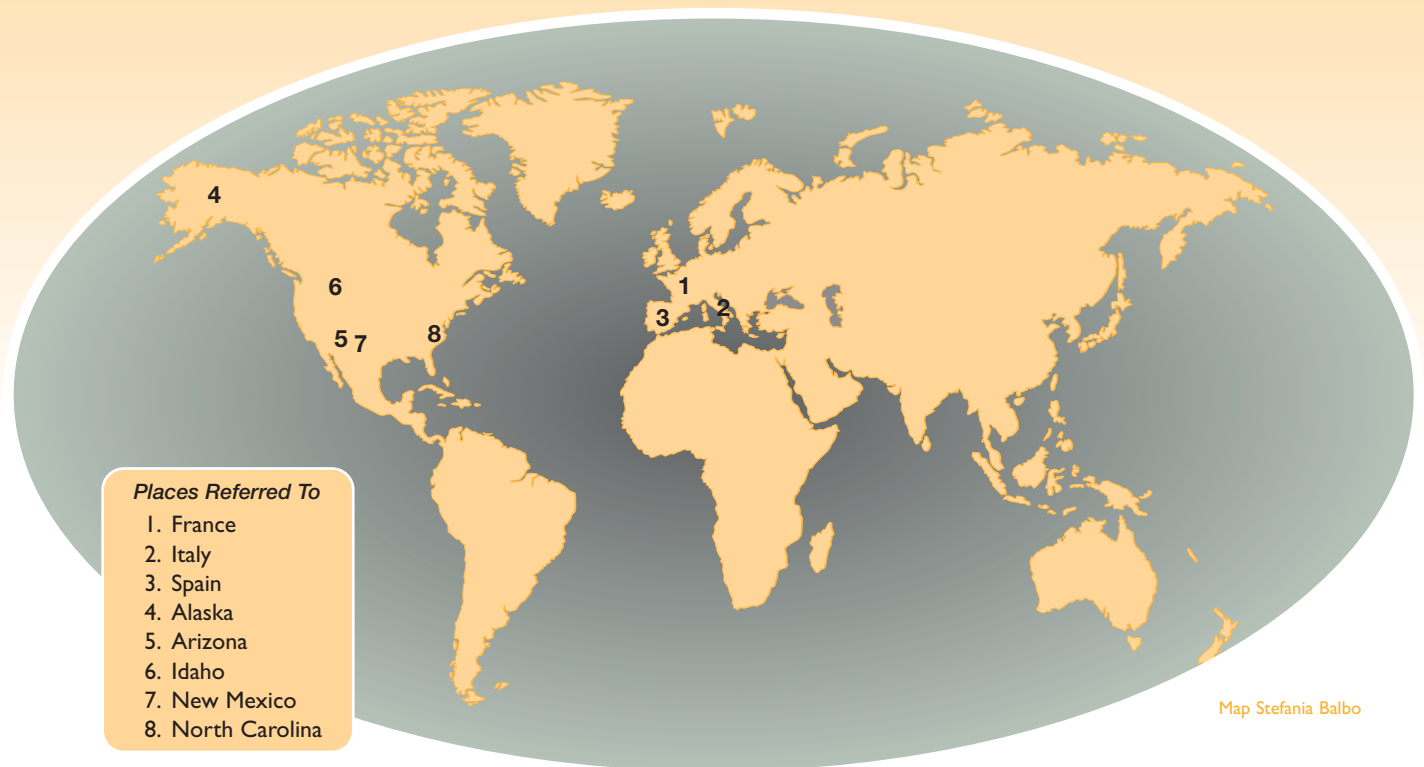
The return of the wolf shows that they're not always "the bad guy". Since

1999, researchers have been studying wolves in the region as part of the "Wolf Plan". The idea of the plan is twofold: on one hand, to study the wolves, their diet and movements; on the other hand, to prevent predation on livestock and monitor those attacks which occur.

Based on the data from the study, in spite of the increased number of packs, the number of attacks on livestock has not risen proportionally. One reason for this is collaboration with farmers, who have been given free livestock guardian dogs and electric fencing.

Source:

<http://www.cuneocronaca.it/news.asp?id=1077&typenews=primapagina>



Spain

First litter of polar wolves born in Spain

The Lobo Park "Wolf Park" in Antequera has seen the first birth in captivity in Spain of a litter of polar wolves, the rare white Alaska-Tundra wolf which is in serious danger of extinction. Only an estimated 300 of the animals remain living in the wild, with another 20 in captivity.

The four wolf pups, who have now opened their eyes, were separated from their mother at two weeks old and are being bottle-fed to allow them to become accustomed to humans. They will not be returned to the pack for approximately four months.

It is the second polar wolf birth at the park: the same pair of wolves produced just one pup in May 2005, which is blind and lives apart from the rest of the pack.

Source:

<http://www.lobopark.com/>
http://www.typicallyspanish.com/news/publish/article_10318.shtml

NORTH AMERICA

United States

Alaska

Alaska falls short of kills in wolf control program

ANCHORAGE, Alaska. The state is far from meeting its goal in its aerial wolf-kill program that ended April 30: In the effort, 175 wolves were reported killed, a fraction of up to 664 animals targeted by wildlife managers. Total numbers could rise because trappers and hunters have until May 30 to report kills, but officials don't expect a big increase.

Thin snow in many areas made tracking wolves difficult, and high fuel prices kept some pilots and aerial gunners grounded.

"It's a big deal," said Cliff Judkins, chairman of the Alaska Board of Game. "We ought to increase the (killing) methods to meet our goals, and we keep playing around when we need to get the job done."

But advocacy group Defenders of Wildlife contends the low numbers are due to a lack of wolves. Conservation groups say the state has overestimated wolf numbers, and so many have been killed in past years that they're more difficult to find.

The game board launched the predator-control effort five years ago to boost moose populations. The program is run in five areas of the state. This winter, the goal was met in one area. The program accounts for a fraction of the total annual kill of about 1,000 wolves in state: Alaska trappers take most of the animals for their hides.

Conservation groups and others have protested against the predator-control program because state-issued permits allow private gunners to shoot wolves from planes.

To accelerate the number of kills this year, the state Department of Fish and Game decided to offer a \$150 bounty for the left front leg of every dead wolf. Advocacy groups sued and a state Superior Court judge ordered the bounty stopped before a payment had been made, saying the department lacked the authority to offer a bounty.

Source:

By The Associated Press
http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/localnews/2003696245_webwolves06.html

Arizona

Man and wolf have a history of harmonious relationship

Wolves and man have had the longest harmonious, mutually beneficial relationship of any two species in the history of the Earth.

Only in the last 150 years have men and wolves become adversaries, when the United States put forth a 'heroic' effort to eradicate the wolf, but failed. Just in the last 25 years has man realized the value of this long-lost harmonious relationship, and is now restoring the wolf to regions where it once thrived.

The Mexican gray wolf is the most highly endangered wolf in the world. The wolf's restored presence has been of great benefit to all aspects of the biology and ecology of the region, and a significant boost to its economy. But there has never been any animal that has caused so much political and biological controversy.

Much of what is commonly 'known' about the wolf is based on fable: The first fable that must be corrected is that the wolf is not the vicious, evil beast that Little Red Riding hood or the Arizona and New Mexico ranchers would have you believe.

The second fable that needs correcting is that the wolf is not the mystical, supernatural creature that others who revere



the wolf make it out to be. The wolf is simply an essential piece of Mother Nature's complicated puzzle.

With these facts established, it is obvious that man has, and can, co-exist with the wolf.

In Canada, there are more than 50,000 wolves. In Arizona and New Mexico, there are fewer than 60. For generations, Canadians have been successful ranchers dealing with far more, and much bigger, wolves than in Arizona and New Mexico. If ranchers can coexist with the wolf in Canada, ranchers can do it here.

It's time that the local ranchers put forth some effort to deal with the wolf: Ranching is a business. Any business has to deal with adversarial conditions. If you are to be successful in business, you must be able to change as the business environment changes. If you can't or won't change with the business environment, it's time to get into another line of work.

For those truly interested in resolving this dispute, there is a publication entitled Managing Natural Resource Disputes. It is available for free at: <http://www.unce.unr.edu/publications/EBPubs/EB0004.pdf>

It is an 85-page document written for citizen's groups, government resource managers, and others considering the collaborative process to manage natural resource disputes. It is a collaborative effort of university educators and community development officials, with support from the US Department of Agriculture. It is a proven method to reach common ground and establish winning scenarios for all involved.

It requires level-headedness, honesty, integrity and focusing on the overall objective, and not on our specific wants.

With cooperation from both sides, an area of common ground can be found. This will lead to a scenario that all can live with, and a mutually acceptable conclusion.
- William E. Chamberlain Jr., Sparks, Nev.

Source:
<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/opinions/articles/0414satlet4-141.html>
<http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/channel/manamongwolves/?sicontent=0&sicreative=681947392&sitrackingid=6570281&source=gc16>

Idaho

One Of Original Wolves Reintroduced 12 Years Ago Found Dead

BOISE, Idaho (AP) - State fish and game officials say one of the first wolves reintroduced to Idaho 12 years ago has died.

Biologists say the carcass of a female, gray wolf labelled B-16 was found recently near Sabe Creek and the Salmon River. Evidence suggests the wolf died sometime last fall or summer. At best guess, she was about 13 years old.

After being captured from her original homeland in Alberta, Canada, B-16 was among the first to be released in Idaho as part of a federal government program.

Since then, her pack has roamed the rugged and remote heart of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.

Her pack was one of the first to produce pups in the state.

Source:
<http://www.localnews8.com/story.cfm?nav=news&storyID=2334>

New Mexico

Conservation Groups Oppose Catron County Action Against Wolves

SANTA FE, N.M. -- Conservation groups are asking federal law enforcement agents to stop

Catron County from removing a wolf from where the animal was released in southwestern New Mexico.

County officials said the female Mexican gray wolf has a history of cattle depredations, and they want it removed. They also said that if the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service does not act, they could turn to an ordinance enacted in February.

That ordinance asserts that the county has the right to trap and remove wolves deemed dangerous and accustomed to humans. A coalition of conservation groups said, however, that the ordinance is not legal.

Mexican gray wolves are protected under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Source:
<http://www.koat.com/news/13244571/detail.html>

North Carolina

Red Wolf Pups Make First Public Appearance at Nature Centre

The Chattanooga Nature Centre celebrates the birth of five red wolves.

The animals are the most endangered mammal in the United States, with only around 300 in the world.

The Chattanooga Nature Centre has set up cameras in the family's den, so that visitors can see live video of the pups starting next weekend.

"There are no red wolves...there are no grey wolves in this area. But the government is taking steps, as well as the Environmental Education Facilities like us, to dispel all the myths that have been around for years about wolves. They just simply are not the horrible man killers that people think they are." The US Fish and Wildlife Service has not decided where the pups will end up yet.

They could chose to release them into the wild, put them to a captive breeding program, or keep them here at the Nature Centre.

Source:
Submitted by Amanda Odom on April 13, 2007
<http://wdef.com/node/4151>

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





"Ambassadors of the Wild"

UKWCT Film Première at the Royal Geographical Society

Photos by
Richard Bowater



Question and Answer Session l-r – Michelle Paver, Denise Taylor, Sue Smith, John Denness, Rich Watts, Tsa Palmer.

The première of the UKWCT film *"Ambassadors of the Wild"* was held at the Royal Geographical Society in Central London, on 11 May 2007. Two of the film's stars, ambassador wolves Duma and Dakota, received the red carpet treatment and, demonstrating what seasoned actors they are, they serenely took to the stage to the delight of the 400-strong audience. This set the scene beautifully for the rest of the evening.

Charles Hicks, director of the Trust, outlined what was in store for the audience,

and also gave a brief history of the Trust, highlighting how far it has come in the past 12 years.

The purpose of the evening was to view the film *Ambassadors of the Wild*, which documents the work carried out by the Trust, its volunteers and staff, and of course by the wolves themselves.

In 2006 it seemed that every move was followed on camera! Sue Smith, one of our volunteers who works for the BBC, managed to persuade many of her work colleagues and contacts to give up their considerable time (and risk some very expensive camera equipment up close and personal with our wolves!). Along with John Denness and Rich Watts (two of our senior handlers) they spent many hours filming the wolves, from a bird's-eye helicopter view of the trust to underwater footage of our wolves in the lake.

The film preview was very well received, and is narrated by actor Greg Wise (who Sue

managed to interest while having lunch during a film shoot). The unique music score was produced by one of our volunteers, Andy Pearson.

Some of the highlights of the film include footage of the cubs from their early days at the Trust, their first walk in the woods and Alba's first wood walk since his accident.

The film was followed by a presentation by Denise Taylor, updating everyone on the projects that the film highlighted. Finally, there was a question and answer session that included Michelle Paver, the well-known children's author, who is also a Trust patron.

The UK Wolf Conservation Trust works to help keep wolves in the wild by raising much-needed funds for wild wolf projects around the world. A significant percentage of the



John Denness with one of the evening's stars of the show.



Sue Smith, film producer, receives a gift from UKWCT Director, Tsa Palmer.



Michelle Paver and Denise Taylor.

funds raised from the première and sales of *Ambassadors of the Wild* will go directly to support three European projects: the Chisty Les Biological Station in Russia, Balkani Wildlife Society in Bulgaria, and the Veterinary College in Croatia. All three projects undertake a tremendous amount of work saving and protecting wild wolves, often against all odds.

***Ambassadors of the Wild* is now available from our website shop for just £9.99. Log on to www.ukwct.org.**



Wolf depredation and the human conflict in the Carpathian area of Poland

*by Ewa Love
based on conversations with
Professor Andrzej Bereszyński and
Dr Wojciech Śmietana, February 2007
Photos by Dr Wojciech Śmietana*

Wolves have been fully protected in Poland since April 1998 and culling of the individuals that cause serious damage or pose a threat to humans is only permitted through ministerial decision. In the first two months of this year three such applications were considered by the Environment Minister, all of them from the same part of the Carpathian Mountains region.

The wolf population in Poland is an estimated 600 individuals, with around 200 of them occupying the Polish Carpathian area.

During my visit to Poland in February I talked to Professor Andrzej Bereszyński of Poznań Agricultural University, chairman of The State Council for Nature Protection and Dr Wojciech Śmietana, scientist and wolf conservationist who works and lives in the part of that region and feels that some radical steps need to be taken.

Professor Bereszyński told me that The State Council for Nature Protection, after consultation with its members, has advised rejection of all three applications.



Sheep's carcass left by the wolves.

In addition, the applications sent to the Ministry were often incomplete and did not include information on the details of the culling, which are required by the law.

The first application was from the association of sheep and goat farmers to cull twelve wolves causing livestock damage in the area of Brzegi Dolne and Ustrzyki Dolne.

There were twenty wolf attacks reported in the area, in which between sixty and eighty sheep were killed. These applications were also lacking the information on what would be done with the body of the animal after it has been killed (the law states that it is forbidden to possess any remains of the dead wolf's body).

Despite the opposition of The State Council for Nature Protection, the Ministry has given an approval for six wolves from five different wolf packs to be culled.

The first one of those animals, an eighteen months old female, weighing 26kg, was shot dead on the evening of 13 February, 200 metres from a nearby farm.

Second application came from the Starost of the Nowosądecka area and was asking for permission to cull two wolves in the parishes of Łabowa and Piwniczna.

The local authorities were not consulted over this application and it was lacking precise information required on other methods used in protecting livestock and the efficiency of them. According to my knowledge the permission has not been granted.

The third application originated from the Void of the parish of Cisna and requested permission to cull six wolves. According to



The Polish Mountain Shepherd dog.

the data collected, there are only two wolf packs living on that territory, each one made of six individuals, which would mean culling the 50% of the existing wolf population there. No decision has yet been taken but the possibility of reducing the amount of the animals proposed for culling to two or three individuals is being considered.

While expressing on behalf of the State Council for Nature Protection their opposition to the last two applications, Professor Bereszyński highlighted to the Ministry the need to include in the

compensation paid to farmers, domestic dogs killed by wolves.

This issue is becoming a major problem of the wolf depredation as described to me by Dr Śmietana. Wolf attacks have been reported on domestic dogs, some of them pets, others lost by tourists or purposely abandoned and consequently wondering onto the wolves' territory, thus not helping the situation.

The wolves rarely kill livestock guarding dogs, as they are strong enough to protect themselves and fight off the wolves.

According to Dr Śmietana in the last year in the whole region of the Polish area of the Carpathian Mountains wolves have attacked livestock 150 times and killed 500 farm animals. This is twice as many as in the previous year and this figure has gradually risen since 1999, when there was reported 100-150 animals killed. Out of the twenty-five wolf packs in the region six are causing considerable damage and even resorting to attacks on livestock in broad daylight.

The main reason for this is a decline in deer population due to a change in the management of wildlife by the Forestry. In the eighties there was 2.5 deer per square kilometre but due to the damage caused by the animal to the forest and farmland, the Forestry decided to reduce the numbers significantly through intensive hunting, which on the contrary to Scotland, is very popular in Poland and is very lucrative for the Forestry.

Due to the lack of wild prey, wolves resort to killing sheep and goats and in some cases also dogs as a source of food. For many years Dr Śmietana has been involved in the protection of livestock using livestock guard dogs. He has written a guidebook regarding a recommended breed of such dog (see photograph), as well as working with the farmers to introduce various types of protective fencing. He has told me that despite the steps taken, there is a lot of animosity amongst the local farmers against the wolves and this is not helped by the fact that the local governments have not yet fully paid last year's compensation for the loss of livestock to farmers. The total amount was 180.000 złotych of which only 80.000 złotych was paid. In his opinion if the Ministry does not allow the culling of an individual wolf the angered local people may resort to drastic measures in eliminating themselves the animals causing the damage.

Further still, local hunters are using this situation as a reason to remove the wolf from the list of the protected species, and this on its own is extremely worrying.

It is thought that the culling of a few individuals that have been identified as the worst offenders will help to calm the negative feelings of locals. It will not solve the problem in the long run and Dr Śmietana hopes that the local people will see and understand that culling wolves is not a way forward to protect their livestock and domestic dogs.

To help alleviate the human-wolf conflict in this area, Dr Wojciech Śmietana in Bieszczady Mountains and Dr Sabina Pierużek-Nowak in Beskidy Mountains

are carrying out various types of research into wolves in the wild, including radio telemetry, use of livestock guarding dogs and preventive fencing.

Dr Sabina Pierużek-Nowak is also a President of the Association for Nature WOLF. For further reading please refer to www.wolf.most.org.pl

The website has a very good English language version

Most recent update:

In June I have received a further update from Dr Śmietana.

The petition to cull six wolves around the town of Cisna has been rejected by the Polish Environment Minister but since February the number of wolves there diminished as three individuals lost their lives; one of them was killed in a road accident, another died of a suspected tuberculosis and third one was killed by the other wolves.

Some of the local citizens formed a support group against the culling. This sounds like a

positive move but it can sometimes cause antagonism amongst the conflicting parties.

The good news is that Dr Śmietana has been very successful in securing funds for his work from WWF Poland and through the European finance system from Norway. His ongoing projects involve electric fencing and livestock guarding dogs.

I would very much like to thank Dr Wojciech Śmietana for giving up his time to talk to me. His commitment to wolf conservation is second to none and I truly admire his determination. His hard work is making a real difference in that region.


For those who feel they would like to express their views on the matters raised above to the Polish Environment Minister the address is:

Professor Jan Szyszko
Minister Środowiska
Ul. Wawelska 52/54
00-922 Warszawa
POLAND

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Cornelia Hutt - Red Wolf Recovery USA
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www.ukwolf.org



Ecological Studies of Wolves on Isle Royale Annual Report 2006-2007

by Brian James

This year's report on the Wolves of Isle Royale by John A. Vucetich and Rolf O. Peterson (of the School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science of the Michigan Technological University) was published on 31 March 2007.

Two phases of ground-based fieldwork and observation were undertaken by the research team(s) in 2006-2007:

- The summer phase ran from early May to late October 2006.
- The winter phase ran from 23 January to 5 March 2007.

The winter phase of the study commenced later than usual, as an unseasonably warm period at the turn of the year and the first two weeks of January meant that ice conditions were uncertain – there has been a recent short-term trend for warmer winters; perhaps this is a sign of local climate change?

A US Coast Guard helicopter (piloted by Lt, Mike Baker) flew Rolf Peterson and Mark Romanski to the island on 11 January; they found only 1" depth of ice cover at the western end of the island in Washington Harbour itself. The ice cover had increased to 4" by 15 January, when the research team were able to commence movement of equipment and supplies with the team's research aircraft (a Piper PA-18 Super Cub flown by Don E. Glaser) to Washington Harbour, and by 23 January the ice cover had increased to 12".

Summary

The overlying data from this year's annual study was that the Isle Royale wolf population had fallen by 30% during 2006-2007, in numerical terms falling from 30 to 21 wolves. A total of 13 adult wolves had died in the past year, but that loss was offset by the addition of four newborn cubs. The sharp and sad decline in wolf numbers is certainly directly attributable to both the low

reproduction rate amongst the wolf packs, and the further fall in the moose numbers and hence food availability.

The moose population fell by 14%, in numerical terms falling from 450 to a historic low of 385 (a long way from the peak numbers of over 3,000 in the early 1930s); it is worth considering that over a five year period the moose population has dramatically declined by over 60%. The overall ratio of moose to wolves remains low; and with this decline in their food resource, the research team fully expect a further decline in the wolf population until nature balances the predator and prey numbers.

Observations

Visual observations of the Middle Pack were made twice, and the Chippewa Harbor Pack eight times. The East Pack was observed most frequently, but with their location and movements in the more heavily forested areas it was difficult to make true and complete counts. It should be noted that radio and aerial/visual observations of the packs were affected by various factors this study year:

- Only one wolf (in the East Pack) had a working radio collar.
- Due to the warmer winter, the wolves were not limited to travelling the lakes and shorelines, making them difficult to see or track amongst the forests; this was particularly true of the East Pack.
- The lack of snow meant that few identifiable tracks were left even when the wolves were travelling on the frozen lakes and shorelines.
- A further weather-related factor was several days of high winds; this reduced the available flight-time the Super Cub could be used for aerial observation.

Wolf Pack Territories - 2007





Packs and Sizes

The three territorial packs on Isle Royale have remained the same since 2000; the breakdown for the pack sizes is based on an eight-day study period, in which maximum pack sizes were observed:

- East Pack III (EP) 6
- Chippewa Harbor Pack (CHP) 7
- Middle Pack II (MP) 8

During the study two or three wolves from one or more of the above packs also created a temporary pack in the central part of the island, with successful moose kills. The team noted what are thought to have been the wolves of this small pack roaming with members of the MP, the lack of confrontation or aggression may suggest that this new pack may actually originate from the MP.

Four pups were born and raised in the study period; two in the CHP and two in the MP. The 13 wolves that died during the past year represents a high mortality rate of 43% (compared with 23% in the previous year); the research team found the remains of two wolves that had apparently been killed by other wolves; one of these had been the alpha female of the CHP, and who was found in January.

Pack Dynamics

The dynamics of the packs has continued to evolve, with a turnover in pack leadership.

- The MP's alpha male was last seen alive in the October; he was estimated to have been 8-10 years old. The pack's alpha female is of a similar age but is alive and well.
- The CHP's alpha male (and pack founder) was killed in a confrontation with the EP in January 2006², and the pack's alpha female (and pack founder) died on the shore of Anglemore Lake in December 2006, the location suggests she was also killed in a confrontation with the EP.
- The EP's male is now quite old, probably around 10, and the team observed him tolerating the younger males openly courting with the pack's two females. The pack's alpha female produced cubs in 2006 - her first year as the alpha, so this is encouraging.

The recent turnover of long-term pack leaders may end the relative stability of the packs that has been evident since 2000, the possible MP offshoot as a new small pack may confirm this.

The territorial dynamics between the three packs also continues to shift. The EP have depleted moose numbers in the eastern range of their territory to the extent that they have challenged the CHP (and during which confrontations they appear to have caused the death of both CHP alphas during 2006), and now range over what had been CHP territory on the north side of the island.

As noted above, observations indicated the possible forming of a new small pack of two or three wolves in the central range of the island; while this may be a small group, they were observed to have killed three moose over a ten day period, although one kill was ambushed by the larger CHP.

A worrying evolution of the packs and their behaviour is their increasing encroachment towards, and proximity to, humans and human habitation – so-called "Fearless Wolves". Residents have reported wolves from the EP chasing smaller prey (notably fox) on the roads in and around Rock Harbor; backpackers on trails have been stalked, and wolves are openly entering and intruding into camping areas. So far there is no indication of confrontational or aggressive behaviour by the wolves; however, their curiosity, and the lessening of their fear of humans, may become a worry in forthcoming years - particularly if their natural prey becomes difficult to hunt or otherwise scarce due to wider ecological factors. Park rangers are being proactive, and are now warning visitors not to attempt to feed these Fearless Wolves.

Hunting and Kill Rates

The difficulties in visual observations noted above lead to only occasional confirmation of kill rates for the MP and CHP. Easier conditions allowed more observation of the EP, and these were seen to kill six moose over 40 days – this equates to a kill rate (kills/wolf/day) of 0.03 (compared with a kill rate of 1.4 the previous year); however, this low kill rate was higher than the research team had expected given both the low moose numbers and the

unseasonable winter conditions for hunting. Perhaps as a result of the lack of young moose (and relative lack of old moose), while the wolves predated and killed at a low rate, they then consumed more of their kill carcasses than normal - this was confirmed by the team's necropsies on 12 wolf-killed moose.

Wider Issues and Island Ecology

Further wider issues arise from the general ecology of the island as a 'closed environment', and notably the actual forest vegetation. The forested areas of the central part of the island are still recovering from widespread fire damage in the 1930s, and so provide little winter forage for the moose. In the west of the island the balsam fir (the favoured forage of moose) forests have reached the age where the canopy trees are dying out, the browsing/grazing of younger balsam trees by moose is preventing the trees reaching maturity – this is another area where nature will need to balance itself. In the east of the island, the forests still contain a good range of balsam fir trees of all stages of growth, and these therefore support a larger moose population; and of course the eastern part of the island also supports the bulk of the island's wolf population in terms of the CHP and EP.

The possible effects of ongoing climate change are also being noted. Warmer conditions in winter and spring may seem beneficial, but this does increase the incidence of moose tick; the more significant factor in spring has been the reduction in precipitation, which results in a slower and reduced 'green-up' of the vegetation. The continuation of a short-term trend (7 out of the last 9 years) of warmer or even hot summers has been a factor on the moose population; moose forage less in such warm (very hot in 2006) conditions, so members of the moose herd gain less weight and general condition; this in turn makes them less able to survive the winter and raise strong offspring the following year - there has been a decline in the overall strength and health of the calves in the summers of 2005 and 2006. The winter of 2007 was close to average in terms of temperature (an ice bridge formed between the island and mainland Ontario for a couple of weeks in early February); however, warmer winters along with lower amounts of precipitation³ as snowfall affect the wolf-moose relationship, as moose are harder to hunt and predate in the unseasonable winter conditions. These wider factors of changing ecology and climate (whether natural or man-made effects) combine to create a strain on the wolf as the apex predator in this environment.

The moose herd dynamics themselves are worthy of further study and consideration, as they directly affect the wolf population in the medium term. As noted above, the moose herds had relatively few offspring in spring 2006, and wolf scat analyses by the research team indicates a high predation of moose calves. The low



rate of moose population 'recruitment' (possibly as low as 6% against a longer term average of 14%) of younger moose within the herds will lead to the herds becoming 'middle-age centric' in the short to medium term; this is not good for the wolves, as middle-age moose tend to be fitter and stronger, with a consequent higher survival rate.

The evolution and changes to the overall island ecology and climate, and the moose herd dynamics, will affect the wolf/moose ratio into the medium term. Left to her own devices, nature will balance the flora and fauna on the island, and with that the prey and predator relationship/ratio of moose and wolves; a natural decline in wolf numbers will need to occur in order to balance the prey/predator ratio; the research team suggest a "substantial decline" in the wolf population may have to occur.

Notes

- ¹ The research was headed by Rolf Peterson and John Vucetich; assisted by Matt Abbotts, Sam Gardner, Marcy Erickson, Dan Graham, Melissa Watkins, Erin Largent, Carolyn Peterson, Leah Vucetich, Don E. Glaser (pilot), Mark Romanski, Valena Hofman, Beth Kolb, Dieter Weise, Cindy Glase and Marshall Plumer. The team were also grateful to the work of US Forest Service pilots Wayne Erickson, Dean Lee and Pat Lowe for flying supplies from Minnesota to Isle Royale.
- ² The actual kill was observed, and is well documented on www.isleroyalewolf.org.
- ³ The effects of low precipitation can also be seen on a wider local scale. In May 2007 there are near record low water levels in Lake Superior; access to some parts of Isle Royale by boat is becoming difficult.

Web Links

John A. Vucetich and Rolf O. Peterson's site:
<http://www.isleroyalewolf.org>

Isle Royale National Park site: <http://www.isle.royale.national-park.com>

US National Park Service site: <http://www.nps.gov/isro>

Isle Royale Institute site:
<http://forest.mtu.edu/research/iri/index.htm>

Isle Royale Natural History Association site: <http://www.irnha.org>

Further Reading

Wolf Ecology and Prey Relationships on Isle Royale by Rolf O. Peterson (1974 - Purdue University).

The Wolves of Isle Royale by David Mech (1966 - US Govt. Print Office).



Isle Royale is the grand-daddy of wolf research projects, having been the site of continuous study since 1959, involving some of the 'big names' of wolf conservation. But what makes this 544km² island so special for wolf biologists?

Well, firstly, the isolation of the island means that relatively few species have colonised: The 24 kilometres of icy Lake Superior waters separating Isle Royale from the mainland means that only a third of the mainland species are present. Moose only arrived around 1900; the wolves following some 50 years later.

More importantly, the wolves here are the only predator on moose, which accounts for about 90% of their diet, and humans do not harvest either species. Thus, a single-prey-single-predator system is formed, making the interactions easier to understand (we had a glimpse in Issue 30 of *Wolf Print* how complicated population dynamics can be, in the article looking at how wolves might fare in Scotland).

So, when considering how wolf and moose population levels fluctuate over the years, Isle Royale offers a relative simplicity: Population biologists use the formula that this year's population size equals last year's size plus all the births and immigrations into the population, and minus all the deaths and emigrations out of the population. The near impossibility for wolves and moose to either leave or arrive here means that only births and deaths need to be factored in. This nature of island biogeography has made them special places for ecologists: The Darwin's Finches of the Galápagos and the foxes of the Channel Islands are only two amongst many more examples.

Isle Royale has short, cool summers, and is perhaps better defined by the long, snowy winters, the temperature dropping below freezing typically in mid-September and patches of snow remaining until May or even June, with 150-200cm annual snowfall being typical, leaving depths of 60-70cm on the ground through January and February. However, the temperatures at this time are quite mild, ranging from -5 to -15°C. Yearly variability in climate has important consequences for the wolves and moose.

Adolph Murie studied the moose here in 1929 and 1930, when maybe two to three thousand moose lived on Isle Royale. Murie's prediction of a dramatic decline proved accurate, with only 500 moose left in 1935, according to state biologist Paul Hickie: Dramatic fluctuations were typical of the moose population prior to wolves arriving, as population explosions triggered later food shortages.

Wolves crossed an ice bridge to the island sometime between 1948 and 1951, and James Cole promoted the idea of a long-term study, which began in 1959. Dr Durwood Allen and David Mech began this work, resulting in the latter's 1966 landmark book, *The Wolves of Isle Royale*.

Rolf Peterson began studying under Dr Allen in 1970, becoming director of investigations five years later upon Dr Allen's retirement. He was only ten years old when the long-term study began! He has a B.A. in Zoology and a Ph.D. in Wildlife Ecology, and is currently a Professor at the School of Forestry and Wood Products, Michigan Tech. He has been the recipient of numerous honours and awards, from his high school days to the present, and is on the Board of Directors of the *International Wolf Centre* in Minnesota.

Other current appointments include Team Leader for the Recovery Team for the Eastern Gray Wolf, appointed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Expedition Leader for Earthwatch volunteers studying *Moose and Wolves of Isle Royale*, involving 300 participants. His research has covered not only Isle Royale, but also wolf and elk studies in Yellowstone, wolf research in Minnesota and Michigan, plus consultancy work in Norway, again focusing on wolves.

He has been mentioned in numerous magazine articles ranging from *National Geographic* to the *Wall Street Journal*, and his own scientific publications list stands currently at around one hundred articles.

As if that were not enough, he has published two books: The 1977 *Wolf ecology and prey relationships on Isle Royale*; and the 1995 *The Wolves of Isle Royale – A Broken Balance*. This second book is due to be re-printed, and will be available in October of this year ... it is already on my Amazon wish list!

Chris Senior

Crossing the boundaries

by Ewa Love

Almost in every one of us there is a strong temptation to get as close as possible to animals. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why we keep pets, because it gives us an opportunity to befriend an animal; or why we visit Zoos as it gives us a chance to get closer to wild animals: something that would not otherwise be possible. How often do we want to pick up a baby animal?

But what happens if we get too close? What happens if we cross the boundaries without having the knowledge and experience of the species? We may well cause the animal unnecessary suffering, possibly resulting in death. Nature has its own wisdom that we may not fully understand. We all have a responsibility for the actions we take, but it seems to be nature that has to deal with the consequences.

There are people at the UKWCT, and all over the world, working closely with wolves. But the vital difference is that they have knowledge, experience and respect when it comes to handling these animals, without harming them in the name of conservation: crossing the boundaries can only be done by certain individuals acting in order to benefit the species; not themselves. The consequences of someone lacking knowledge but getting involved harms the animal, and does not aid conservation.

An example of such thoughtless actions, by a member of public in Albania, made the news recently.

Rrok Hoti, a villager from Gore, near the town of Patok in the Kurbin region, captured a wild wolf in the mountains and caged him, claiming that he wanted to open a zoo.

If this was not bad enough, he then threw a live donkey into the wolf's cage for the wolf to eat! This was a clear example of complete ignorance and a total lack of understanding of this species: A single wolf in a small cage is not going to eat a live donkey sitting in front of him, no matter how hungry he may be; wolves hunt prey that runs away from them, and mainly hunt as a pack. Their prey includes deer, sheep, and goats, but

rarely donkeys. If this man had been knowledgeable about wolves, he would have at least known that it was more likely for the wolf to eat the donkey if it was dead, and given to the wolf as carrion.

This sad story reached the media at the beginning of May, and it seemed that the wolf has been caged for the previous four months. As one can see from the pictures, the cage was tiny and the conditions he was kept in were appalling.

Many of the UKWCT's supporters e-mailed to voice their concerns, after spotting this story in the media. What to some seemed to have been an 'amazing friendship', to many was a clear case of animal suffering. Photographs show the terrified wolf hiding under the donkey! How sad is that? Many people instantly knew something had to be done for those two animals, and pursued various avenues to free these media-created 'friends'. Yes, they may have appeared as friends to some, but not to those with knowledge of the animal world, who instantly recognized their suffering.

The Wolf Print editorial team has also been in touch with Tracey-Ann Church, a caring individual, with friends helping her worldwide to free the wolf and the donkey: As well as launching an online petition to the Albanian Prime Minister, Professor Sali Berisha, she also contacted WSPA (World Society for the Protection of Animals). Her international friends sent Tracey-Ann various articles from the Albanian papers, and she received regular updates from WSPA.

Some of the Albanian newspapers' reports dating from the first week of June were confusing as to what happened to both of the animals: There were claims that the wolf was released, in one article, and then in another that Rrok Hoti has refused to release him and hid the wolf in the forest, tied to a tree. There was a report claiming that the donkey has been released and a photograph showed an empty cage; another one, a freed donkey. This, however, has not happened as yet.

It was thanks to the WSPA that the wolf was freed (update from 9 June), as one of their member societies in Albania met with the Ministry of Environment. The statement below was published on the Albanian Ministry of Environment website:

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration would like to inform that Mr. Rrok Hoti (Kurbin region) has released the Wolf, Canis lupus, in the forestry economy Mal-Bardhe (Kurbin region). The Forestry Service Directorate of Lac in its letter No. 90 on



06/06/07 informs that the release of the Wolf took place after the communication with Mr. Hoti that the imprisonment of the wolf violates the acts 20, 21 and 23 of the Law No. 9587, on 20.07.2006 'For the preservation of biodiversity'. Furthermore, the imprisonment violates also the acts of Regulation No. 1 on 3.02.2005 'For the protection, management of wildlife and hunting' in accordance with the Law no. 7875 on 23.11.1994 'For the protection of wildlife and hunting'.

This is a very positive outcome, however, the donkey is not yet free. For those who would like to sign a petition to free the donkey the website address is as follows: <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/171270834>

Almost fourteen thousand people have signed this petition in the last few weeks; the goal is twenty thousand signatures.

This issue has also brought Albania into the spotlight, as many wondered about animal welfare there. Perhaps the suffering of those two animals will be a step forward in raising public awareness, however, it was a pointless and completely unnecessary act, and those two animals should have never been taken out of their natural habitats and placed together.

Sources:

Tracey-Ann Church, electronic correspondence
http://www.moe.gov.al/cms_en/
<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/171270834>
 Albanian newspapers: Panorama and Gazeta Shqiptare





Humans are not wolves!

by Denise Taylor

Isn't wolf behaviour fascinating? A lot of people must think so because according to Mech and Boitani in their book *Wolves: Behaviour, Ecology and Conservation*, they have become one of the most studied species in the world. The question is: What makes them so fascinating? Certainly their behaviours are complex, and the importance of their role within the ecosystems they inhabit is now widely accepted to the extent that scientific researchers spend much of their time providing evidence to support the case for the conservation of wolves.

It is also well documented that the human fascination for wolves has a spiritual basis. The wolf is a species that we identify with closely. There are parallels in the way wolves and humans live their lives, each forming strong family bonds with structured hierarchies, raising young, and teaching them the skills they will need to survive in life. Judao-Christian religion went a step further and used what are perceived by humans to be the more negative traits of the wolf to symbolise the devil and all that is evil. Conversely, native American Indians took the opposite approach, and focused on the positive aspects of wolf behaviour: their intelligence, good hunting skills, and the strength and aesthetic beauty of the animal itself. They viewed the wolf as a teacher, and as a fellow creature.

The complex mix of culturally-derived attitudes, scientific knowledge, and socio-economic and political influences have brought us to the current situation where wolf populations are steadily recovering throughout the world, after centuries of persecution and widespread destruction.

There are still polarised groups on wolves. It seems you either love them or you hate them, and a lot of this still depends on where you live, how you make your living and how you were brought up.

In Western societies, we probably know more about the wolf today than we've ever known. And there is still so much more to learn. But because we do now have a growing body of scientific evidence about wolf behaviours, that is supporting the conservation of the species as a whole, it is disheartening when National Geographic, a high profile and highly respected organisation, broadcasts a programme that has the potential to undermine a lot of this work by listening to the psycho-babble of someone who appears to be primarily interested in being a self-publicist rather than a wolf advocate.

Anyone who has spent any time at all with wild animals will know that a lot of their behaviours are instinctive and innate. Thus self-proclaimed "Wolf Man" Shaun Ellis's attempts at teaching wolves how to howl and hunt gives one the impression of an arrogant and colonial attitude that really ought to have been left behind in the enlightened times we now live in in wildlife conservation circles. Furthermore, to try and assert that you are accepted as a "wolf" in the pack is not just laughable, but also extremely dangerous, not just for the person making this assertion, but for the wolves too. In the programme, Ellis demonstrated that he was alpha male in his "pack", and indeed the wolves accepted him as being dominant. The end sequence, however, showed Ellis having been demoted to omega status. There are two issues here. One is that broadcasting this kind of

interaction and behaviour with wolves gives totally the wrong impression. It is going down the same route as the macho-driven pursuits of the seemingly burgeoning number of TV presenters who think it is acceptable to drag what are perceived to be scary and highly dangerous creatures from their habitats, and wrestle with them and dominate them. Quite how this can be called conservation, I'm not entirely sure, and it certainly doesn't contribute anything to our knowledge of these creatures. The other issue is that there is a very real risk that one or several of the wolves within the pack could turn on Ellis, and badly injure him. We may still have a lot to learn about wolves, but one thing we do know is that you cannot generalise about wolf behaviour. The complexities involved make this virtually impossible. An attack on Ellis would potentially undo decades of work undertaken by thousands of people who work with and for wolves. The wolves themselves would very likely have to be destroyed, and through one man's misguided or foolish attempts at demonstrating the dynamics of wolf behaviour in this way, he would simply be achieving quite the opposite.

At the UKWCT, we have many volunteers who have a strong and close bond with our own captive wolves. They have not felt the need to teach the wolves how to howl, hunt or to carry out any of the other innate behaviours that come naturally to them whether they are wild or captive. They have also not felt the need to eat from a carcass, nor urinate along territorial boundaries to prove their status. You are either accepted by a particular wolf pack or not as the case may be. Much

depends on the dynamics of the situation at a point in time: how the wolf pack is currently structured in terms of hierarchy, the age of the wolves, their health, your health and strength, and your approach to them. In Ellis's case, the wolves were pups and then juveniles at the time he had "alpha" status, when it is not difficult to play a dominant role in their lives. Maintaining that "dominance" is a different story, and one not achieved by everyone who works with wolves. And even then, the dynamics can change if you suddenly become ill or have some kind of physical weakness that puts you at a disadvantage. Wolves are

also intelligent creatures. Research has shown them to be problem-solvers, and importantly they know that humans are not wolves.

There are many people throughout the world who work with both captive and wild wolves, and nearly everyone in this situation will tell you that it is a two-way process built on mutual respect, trust and acceptance, and tolerance. The people who have these values are the true heroes of wolf conservation. They don't need or seek self-proclaimed glory.

Colleagues at the UKWCT and in the scientific world of wolf research feel that

Ellis has done wolves and their conservation a great disservice. It is time that we moved away from the worrying increase in "documentaries" that show humans wrestling with dangerous animals. These archaic attitudes that prevail from centuries of classical science and Judeo-Christian beliefs of human dominance over nature should be consigned to the dark ages from which they stemmed. If we want to truly co-exist with other creatures, then we need to accept them for what they are and what they do, and this can only be achieved through true knowledge, understanding and respect.

Photo: Chris Senior



Building the future in *Bulgaria*

by Denise Taylor
(additional material
from Chris Senior)
Photos by Denis Taylor
and Chris Senior

As the plane came in to land at Sofia airport, I jokingly said to Chris Senior, my travelling companion and colleague, that very soon we would probably be able to add building construction to our CV. The next day as we walked up the hill to the new Education Centre, we both quickly realised that the joke was going to become a reality.

Although great progress had been made on the building works since our last visit in December 2006, it was clear that there was still a long way to go. Elena Tsingarska, Bulgarian project leader, had forewarned us that the official opening of the centre would be postponed until later in the year, but we hadn't appreciated how far behind they were. It later turned out that the funders in Germany who were financing the capital part of the project had delayed getting the money to them.

Undaunted, and in the true Bulgarian style we have come to know and love, the team assured us they would be ready for the first phase opening. They were going to host a seminar for 50 schoolchildren from around the region, who would later visit the project's resident large carnivores: Vucho the wolf and Medo the brown bear.

All well and good, but standing in the middle of what was essentially still a building site, Chris and I looked at each other and wondered how on earth they were going to pull this one off. There were no windows or doors, no education displays, and a lot of builders (most of whom spent most of the time sat around smoking), plasterers (who grafted like there was no tomorrow) and the general construction site muck – huge piles of rubble, planks of wood and discarded cement bags. Having seen some rapid major project turnarounds in my previous incarnation of running a contract cleaning business and undertaking many new building cleans, I knew that technically they could get the ground floor ready for the visit, but it would be darn hard work. There were just three short days before the opening on Saturday. Time to roll up the sleeves!

The new building will eventually be the Large Carnivore Education Centre. Based in the Pirin Mountains, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in the village of Vlahi, the Centre is already a commanding site in the foothills of the mountains. The Centre is two storeys high and will house accommodation facilities, stables, a café and shop as well as

exhibition halls and a seminar hall. Bulgaria still has a major problem with how negatively many people perceive large carnivores, and as we have previously reported numerous times in Wolf Print, wolves still attract a bounty. Elena recently reported a case to Chris and myself of a wolf having been tortured shortly after our last visit. The poor animal suffered tremendous cruelty that was both mindless and needless. The project team needs no spurring on to carry out their work, but cases like this do highlight how important it is to educate people about wolves, and about wildlife in general.

Visiting Vlahi now feels like a homecoming. The sights, smells and sounds of the village with its numerous goats, sheep and dogs have become familiar to us. It is a special place, full of special people and animals. And although we could well do without the fleas and their vicious bites, these too are somehow part of the charm of the place.

The purpose of this visit was for a team from Education 4 Conservation to review the progress made on the education centre. The Darwin Initiative (a DEFRA project) has provided the funding for salaries, and for the educational materials and displays at the centre. The UKWCT has raised funding to produce a Wolf Management Plan and to help equip the café and accommodation block.

Over the next few days Chris, myself and my seven year old daughter, Charlotte (also now an intrepid traveller to projects with me), got down to work. We cleared rubble from the front of the site, painted newly erected stud walls, and swept and mopped the stone tiled floors. Meanwhile, Elena's husband, Sider Sedefchev, his father Philip and his brother, Attila, spent time completing the doors and windows they had hand-built, building stud walls for the displays and then installing the doors and windows into their frames. They worked late into the night every night and were up at the crack of dawn every day.

There was one point when we did wonder whether we would make the deadline in time, probably at the stage when it was realised that the holes for the windows were all different sizes! Philip, who is a craftsman of great skill, was not at all impressed by this, but stoically he resolved the situation by



View of the new Education Centre from above.



The churchyard bell.

going round with a tape measure, carefully taking note of all the measurements, and then patiently instructing the builders what they needed to do to remedy the situation. The next problem was that the glass for the windows had been cut to the wrong dimensions and each pane was half a centimetre too big. Thankfully it was summer, the weather was warm and it didn't really make too much difference that the windows weren't glazed at this point. It would be obvious to the visitors that the building was a "work in progress".

More mopping, more sweeping, more painting, more moving of rubble. In between we managed to spend time with Vucho and Medo. It would be lovely to think these wonderful creatures recognised us as old friends, but I suspect deep down that the food we took to them made all the difference. Medo has settled into his new life very well. He loves to greet visitors, and if you spend any length of time sat outside his enclosure, often he will plonk himself down next to the fence by you, and doze in the sunshine. Although he is a captive wild animal, this is a far cry from his previous tormented life as a dancing bear.

Charlotte literally found her feet in Vlahi on this her second visit. She spent a lot of time skipping up and down the steep slopes like a little mountain goat, with Elena's son, Hanko, who is the same age, there being only a month's difference between them. He is hugely protective of her around the large Karakachan livestock guarding dogs, and when they go on their adventures hunting for green lizards and frogs. Neither can speak the other's language, but they have formed a strong bond, and somehow seem to communicate very well. Hanko spends a lot of time in the surrounding hills, and is extremely comfortable around creatures of all sizes. He shows no fear even though he

is dwarfed by some of the animals, and he has an incredible relationship with Vucho.

One evening, Todor, one of the shepherds, came back to the house with a poisonous snake which he had come across earlier that day whilst out with the flocks. He thought it would be great for the children to see. And so for two days, the children spent a lot of time looking at the snake, thankfully safely tucked away in an empty two-litre clear plastic bottle. For much of the time, it seemed content just to lie quietly, curled up in its new temporary home. But clearly this wasn't a long term option, and we eventually released the snake in the village graveyard, which was a very tense moment. It refused to slither out of the bottle, and so Elena had to cut the bottle open and gently ease the snake out. It was at this point that the bell in the graveyard started to ring out. Something we'd never heard before in Vlahi, and judging by the general state of neglect in the graveyard, something that doesn't happen too often. The bell tolling seemed very ominous at the time – an omen of some kind. Elena explained later that it was St George's Day the day after and the bell was being rung to notify the villagers of the impending celebrations.

On the day before the opening of the Centre, it was all hands to the deck. The final painting of the stud walls was done, windows were put into their recesses, and some of the doors were hung. There was much sweeping and mopping. The plasterers were still hard at work rendering the walls in the seminar hall, and the final piles of rubble were removed from the front of the building.

The big day finally arrived. We were all up early and walked over to the Centre soon after breakfast. This might seem a simple thing to do, but walking anywhere at all in

and around Vlahi involves very steep hills, and in my case, aching muscles and getting out of breath. We had three hours before the children arrived, and we got to work straight away. To our dismay, the builders also turned up, and started working in the seminar hall. We'd spent much of the previous evening getting the floors cleaned, and all this hard work had now been for nothing as they laid their plastic sheets and started finishing off the plastering work. By the time they had finished, we had just one hour before the children were due to arrive to clean up again. We also had 50 brand new chairs that had to have the polythene removed from them, food and drink to set out, projection screens to put up, and the final touches to the education displays to be made. Another problem was discovered when the interactive display about the bear's life cycle had not been cut properly. This display comprised a round wooden outer board with pictures of bears, and an inner circular board with text which, when revolved, is matched with the pictures. The pictures and text were on self adhesive poster material and had to be fitted to the revolving boards, but they had to be cut properly in order to do this. Philip, Sider and Elena all spent time discussing how they were going to put this right, and then got down to the time-consuming job of carefully cutting the circles of the displays and fitting them to the board.

At 11 o'clock we received the news that the children had arrived in the village. How we had achieved it I don't know, but we were almost ready to receive the children at the Centre. The walk up the steep hill from the village would take them another few minutes, so everyone frantically dashed around cleaning away all the tools and cleaning materials, and carrying out the last



Elena Tsingarska with Vucho.

minute sweeping and mopping. All the chairs and tables had been laid out in the seminar hall. All that remained was for the exterior door to be hung. As the children came slowly up the hill, the last heavy wooden door was hung in its frame. Phew!

Elena greeted the children, and welcomed them to the new centre. She spent some time explaining how the centre had come about, and the children then went inside to see the displays. Mobile phones and digital cameras came out in force as the children busily read the posters, took lots of photographs and made their way around the exhibits. When the Centre is finally completed, there will be lots of interactive displays about large carnivores. What has to be borne in mind is that a lot of the children who will visit the centre live rurally, and in a culture where hunting and pastoral farming is endemic and attitudes towards large predators are, on the whole, very negative. As with a lot of similar programmes throughout the world, the aim is to present an accurate picture of large carnivores so that adults and children alike can form their own opinions about wolves, bears and lynx. Of course, the hope is always that by presenting the facts about large carnivores, people will learn to at least respect and tolerate them as part of the landscape in which they belong.

After the children had watched a short film about the brown bear project in Russia, they eagerly downed lemonade, ate some very delicious cookies, and set off for the other side of the valley to meet Vucho and Medo. The children were split into groups of ten, and the first group walked up the hill to Vucho's enclosure. Elena was, by this time, inside the enclosure with him and the children kept a safe distance from the fence. Vucho was as nervous as they were and paced around Elena with his tail firmly



Vucho meets one of the local schoolchildren.

tucked between his legs. Finally, he sat on Elena's lap, and looked out at the children apprehensively. So much for the image of the big, bad wolf that the children were probably expecting. As Elena continued to talk, both wolf and children relaxed and by the time their visit was over, they were up against the fence touching Vucho and he was responding by licking hands and faces. Mobile phones and cameras came out again, and Chris was tasked with taking lots of photos of children with their new friend, Vucho.

I wandered down to Medo's enclosure before the first group of children arrived, laden with bags of bread and apples. Medo came to greet us and we were very quickly joined by ten clamouring children charging down the hillside to see him. They each grabbed an apple or piece of bread, and

Medo, unperturbed by the noise, delighted his audience by rearing up on his hind legs as the food was thrown over his fence.

It was finally time for the children to leave, and their teachers told us they had had a great day, and would be back again soon.

Back at the Centre, we sat down to enjoy the remaining cookies, and a very large container of home-made wine. I spent some time talking with a representative from Sofia Zoo who works with the wolves there, and told her about our wolves at the Trust. I was trying to explain to her in Bulgarian that we had nine wolves, having just been taught by seven year old Hanko how to count from one to ten in Bulgarian (or so I thought). Theresa looked at me with a quizzical frown on her face, and I shouted over to Elena: "What is nine in Bulgarian?" Her response made no sense to me and I asked her to repeat it. "That's not what Hanko taught me I replied." It turned out he'd been learning Japanese at martial arts classes and found in me a willing pupil. I had no reason to suspect that a seven year old Bulgarian boy would teach me anything other than Bulgarian and so I had been merrily practising counting one to ten in Japanese, thinking unwittingly (not knowing any Japanese) that I was learning Bulgarian. It was at this point that everyone collapsed in hysterics at the visions of me tramping up and down the hills reciting Japanese diligently for three whole days.

Bulgaria is a beautiful country. The people in the village of Vlaha and at the project are a joy to be with, and make us feel very welcome every time we go there. The Education Centre will breathe new life into the village, and everyone who has contributed to this project has helped to create something that will have an impact for generations to come on both the human and the biotic communities.



Schoolchildren visit the centre on the open day.

