

Wolves of the World

WOLVES IN EUROPE

The Action Plan for Wolf Conservation in Europe

by Jay Hutchinson

Wolves, brown bears, wolverines, and two species of lynx once roamed Europe's broad mosaic of forests, plains and mountains. Humans, ever increasing, came to dominate Europe's landscapes, depleting these large carnivores and forcing them to survive in small pockets and on the fringes of the human landscape.

Wolves were exterminated from most of western Europe during the past

two centuries. Yet, small but healthy populations have survived in Portugal, Spain, Italy, Scandinavia and Greece. Larger populations have survived in Romania, the Balkans, Poland and neighboring countries to the east. In some cases remnant groups are isolated and still decreasing.

In a few areas, such as the Alps and Scandinavia, wolves are returning to where they were earlier exterminated. Wolves from

some eastern countries have also expanded westward into Germany, while some Italian wolves have migrated northward into France.

Wolves in Europe prey on animals ranging from large ungulates to domestic livestock to rodents. Some even subsist on garbage,

having adapted to living amazingly close to humans. Wolf predation on livestock has been the historic reason for the elimination or control of the predators.

Wolves are now protected in most European countries, although enforcement in some countries is very weak.



B. and C. Promberger



B. and C. Promberger

In others, especially in eastern Europe, wolves are considered a game species. Whether wolves are protected or hunted, poaching is widespread.

During the 1990s, public interest in saving wolves spurred a unified effort among Europeans. In 1995, experts from 17 countries (all countries west of the former Soviet Union except Turkey) and the World Wide Fund for Nature launched plans to save Europe's large carnivores. Action plans for each species were drawn up. For the Wolf Action Plan, questionnaires were sent to at least one wolf expert in each country, and

the resulting draft was commented on and revised by the experts.

The Wolf Action Plan was meant to guide each country in implementing a national plan in conformity with its own laws. Because wolves can disperse widely and many European countries are relatively small, the plan also stressed coordinated continental efforts: each national plan had to consider strategies being adopted by neighboring countries. After extensive collaboration, the plan received wide consensus and was recommended by the Bern Convention. Each country is supposed to draft its own national action plan and adopt legislation to accommodate the provisions.



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Wolf predation on livestock has been the historic reason for the elimination or control of wolves in Europe.

The overall objective of the plan is to “maintain and restore, in coexistence with people, viable populations of wolves as an integral part of ecosystems and landscapes across Europe.” Specific goals are:

1. Allow the wolf to recover and live throughout Europe wherever it is biologically and economically feasible;
2. Ensure wolf-human coexistence and a sustainable compromise by limiting the conflicts; and
3. Achieve a Pan-European perspective in managing wolf recovery and help ensure wolf conservation and management on a continental scale.


Factors to be considered are habitat restoration, travel corridors, ensuring food supplies (such as possibly reintroducing natural wild prey), human attitudes, problem wolves and damage to livestock, compensation to farmers and shepherds, and wolf-dog hybrids.

The plan discusses ways the wolf can be made economically profitable to

communities, including guided tours, howling sessions, selling plaster casts of tracks, wolf logos and labels on tourist goods, and interpretive centers with captive animals. The plan also stresses that education, media contacts and public involvement are necessary to win acceptance by the local community.

Lastly, the plan acknowledges the need for applied research, especially on European wolf genetics, dispersal, mortality and the interesting tolerance of wolves to human disturbance to an extent unknown in North America.

For more information, see

 *Action Plan for the Conservation of Wolves (Canis lupus) in Europe*, April 2000, compiled by Luigi Boitani, at www.large-carnivores-lcie.org.

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WOLVES IN GERMANY

Outlook for German Wolves Positive in Spite of Livestock Losses

by Neil Hutt

The attitude toward wolves is extremely positive, but we all know how fast this can change to the extreme opposite.

— Oliver Matla, president, German Wolf Association, *International Wolf*, Winter 2001

The excitement over the return of the wolf to Germany and the birth of the first pups (spring 2001) in more than 150 years has been tempered by recent livestock losses. In late April 2002, a new pack believed to consist of three 2-year-old wolves, killed 27 sheep in the Lausitz region of Saxony.

Following the attacks, shepherds lost no time in employing a number of deterrents, including flare pistols, electrified fencing and 24-hour vigils by teams of volunteers. Oliver Matla, president of the German Wolf Association, reported that although a couple of shepherds demanded the wolves be killed, no organizations or individuals have

called for a wolf hunt. The state of Saxony compensated the owner of the sheep at 100 percent of the market price. The law calls for 80 percent compensation in the future, but some shepherds want wolf organizations to pay the remaining 20 percent.

The attacks surprised Saxony's Agriculture and Environment Ministry. The area has abundant prey, including wild boar and deer. Matla, cautious from the beginning about naive presumptions regarding wolves and domestic animals in proximity, expressed regret at the depredations. "We hoped it wouldn't happen that early," he said, "but you know how wolves are."

Nevertheless, Matla expressed admiration for the shepherd, whom he characterized as "very considerate" despite the loss of his sheep. This shepherd related a close encounter with the wolves after the volunteers stopped guarding his flock. The wolves returned to the pasture, where, Matla said, the shepherd noticed the



pack in the distance. He hammered on the engine hood of his tractor, but that seemed to attract the wolves rather than scaring them off. The shepherd said the wolves approached and came very close to him. He tossed a lighter at one of the wolves, but this had no effect. He then climbed back onto his tractor, and the wolves moved away.

Christoph Promberger, director of the Carpathian Large Carnivore Project, observed that in Romania, shepherds have noticed that wolves living near to livestock are less fearful of humans. Yet in spite of the attacks on sheep and the encounter reported by the



Annette Meritens

In April 2002, a wolf pack killed 27 sheep in Saxony, Germany, but in spite of these attacks, the outlook remains positive for wolves repopulating eastern Germany. No other losses have been reported as of August 2002.



WOLVES IN BULGARIA

Wolves Make Steady Gains in Bulgaria

by Neil Hutt

Whenever I talk to foresters or hunters, they invariably offer to pay me to bring in a dead wolf; I offer to buy them a drink for each wolf they do not kill.

— Alan Wittbecker, Ph.D.,
ecologist, Balkani Wildlife Society

shepherd, the outlook remains positive for wolves repopulating much of eastern Germany. No other losses have been reported as of August 2002, and monitoring of the wolves in the original pack indicates that they have continued to hunt only moufflon (wild sheep), wild boar and deer.

Matla hopes humans and wolves can coexist in a region where wolves reappeared after being extinct since the 19th century. With that objective in mind, the Society for the Protection of Wolves initiated an information weekend for hunters and shepherds following the attacks. Attended by members of the German Wolf Association, the session included lectures by wolf biologists Gesa Kluth, Erik Zimen and Christoph Promberger. Meanwhile, in Saxony, where wolves are legally protected, nonlethal measures are being taken to help the region's shepherds deal with the threat.

The author thanks Oliver Matla for providing regular updates on the wolves in Germany.

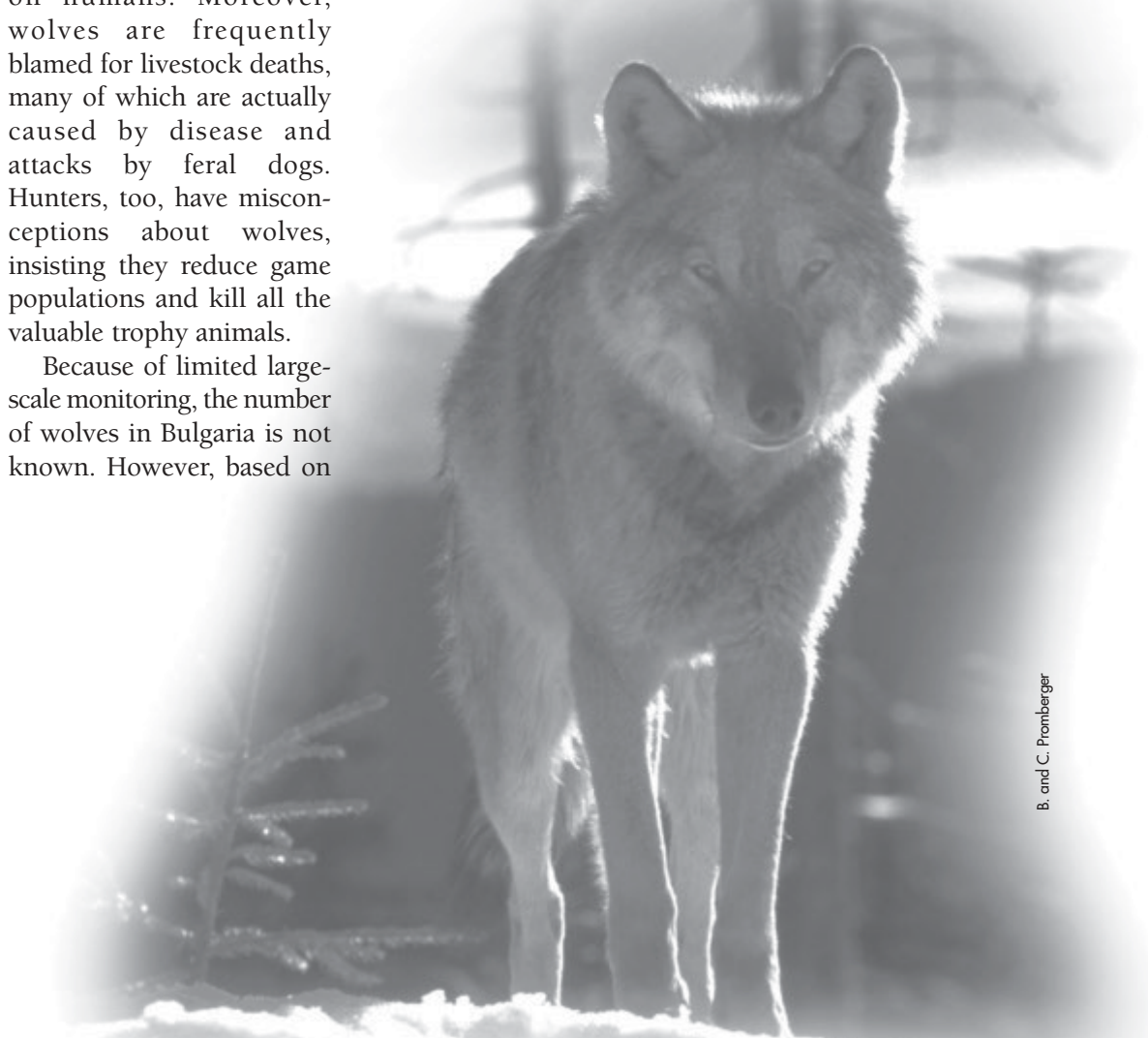
In Bulgaria public attitudes toward wolves are often negative, especially in rural areas, where many people believe wolves prey on humans. Moreover, wolves are frequently blamed for livestock deaths, many of which are actually caused by disease and attacks by feral dogs. Hunters, too, have misconceptions about wolves, insisting they reduce game populations and kill all the valuable trophy animals.

Because of limited large-scale monitoring, the number of wolves in Bulgaria is not known. However, based on

harvest data, questionnaires, surveys for sign (tracks, scat, fur and snow urinations) and incidental sightings, the *Action Plan for the Conservation of Wolves (Canis lupus) in Europe* (April 2000) estimates that perhaps 800 to 1,000 wolves survive in Bulgaria's fragmented habitats. The population trend is stable, according to the plan.

This is encouraging news. In 1980, an estimated 100 wolves existed only in

the most remote and inaccessible regions of Bulgaria. As in other parts of the world, including many areas of North America, wolves have been the victims of habitat reduction, encroaching human settlement and relentless extermination. Gradually, however, wolves have increased, and surveys to determine accurate population numbers are now being conducted by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Balkani Wildlife Society. The cost of radio-collaring and aerial tracking is often prohibi-



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tive; however, some money has been obtained from the Ministry of Environment and Water and from several NGOs and private donors.

In addition to public education and outreach initiatives, conservationists are pushing hard for legal protective measures. For example, last year the Balkani Wildlife Society and the Semperviva Society challenged specific articles in a federal hunting and game management regulation. In May 2002, the High Administrative Court of Bulgaria decided that contrary to the government regulation, traps cannot be used for hunting predators. The judgment also states that traps and poison should

not be used for hunting game. Additionally, the court issued a decision that wolves killed by hunters must be recorded, a reversal of the regulation article stating that no recording is required.

Research is needed to understand both the status of wolves in Bulgaria and the extent of the threats to their long-term survival. The Balkani Wildlife Society is exchanging data with other carnivore projects, and the Carpathian Large Carnivore Project, under the direction of Christoph Promberger, assisted with radio-collaring Bulgarian wolves in May 2002. Information and outreach efforts and management



of predators need to be increased. To this end, education sessions have begun in selected schools, and the Balkani Wildlife Society has launched a program to provide shepherds in southern and western Bulgaria with Karakachan guard dogs.

Researchers are determined and hopeful. “Whenever I ask children if they want to live near wolves, they say, yes,” Alan Wittbecker reports. “I agree. I would not want to live in a wolf-less Bulgaria much less a wolf-less world.”

For more information, see:

-  *Action Plan for the Conservation of Wolves (Canis lupus) in Europe*, April 2000, compiled by Luigi Boitani, at www.large-carnivores-lcie.org;
-  The Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE), News and Events, May 8, 2002, www.large-carnivoreslcie.org/news70.htm;
-  and report by Alan Wittbecker, Balkani Wildlife Society, April 11, 2002, <http://forums.delphiforums.com/Wolfseeker/>.

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WOLVES IN THE UNITED STATES

Adaptive Management: A Success Story for Red Wolves?

by Shauna Baron

Interbreeding (hybridization) between red wolves and coyotes has long been a threat to the survival of the highly endangered red wolf. In 1999, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists partnered with other scientists to conduct research and design an Adaptive Management Plan to better understand the interbreeding phenomenon. Estimates showed that if interbreeding could not be controlled, the red wolf would be unrecognizable as a distinct species within as few as three to six generations (12 to 14 years).

Today the Red Wolf Recovery Program field team is demonstrating that interbreeding can be managed successfully in eastern North Carolina. By early 2001, the field team had created a coyote-free and hybrid-free



Barron Crawford, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Barron Crawford, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

zone known as Zone 1 of the red wolf experimental population area (see map). Immediately to the west in Zone 2, any known hybrids have been sterilized so they cannot produce offspring. These sterile animals hold territorial space until wolves can take their place. Additionally, the number of hybrids in Zone 3, the most western zone, has been reduced.

In 2001 three hybrid litters were found in the management area, all on the western edge of Zone 3, where interface with coyotes was expected. However, at the beginning of the denning season in spring 2002 only one hybrid litter, also at the edge of Zone 3, was found. The boundaries of Zones 1 and 2 are, therefore, being extended to reflect the expansion of the coyote- and hybrid-free zone.

To establish a healthy and viable population, the red wolves must defend their territories against non-wolf canids. Recent observations suggest that red wolves are beginning to displace coyotes and hybrids, though confirmation of this requires further investigation.

The red wolf field team has extraordinary plans for 2003. One effort will focus on removing sterile hybrids from Zone 2. This measure will allow red wolves to acquire territories in that zone through natural dispersal. In addition, two red wolves from a program where wolves were raised naturally on an island will be released into the wild. Finally, plans call for the insertion of captive-born pups into wild litters, a method also known as fostering. These three methods will augment the wild population and increase genetic diversity, thus enhancing the long-term survival of red wolves.

The fostering of captive-born pups into wild-born litters was first attempted in May 2002. The North Carolina Zoo donated two pups, a male and a female, from a litter of six born at the zoo. Microchips were implanted in the pups for identification, and the animals were transported to the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. The pups were placed into a den containing two wild-born pups. All four pups were the same age. The 6-year-

old mother, Wolf 978F, had raised six pups the previous years, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologists were optimistic that she could manage a litter of four. Frequent monitoring of the den site using radio telemetry showed that 978F had accepted the new pups as her own. The biologists reported that all was going well as of September 2002, exciting news indeed.

If it continues to be successful, the fostering method may help the Red Wolf Recovery Program continue to build the world's only wild red wolf population. Research in genetics and exciting new techniques such as fostering

Photo far left: (Left to right) Chris Lucash, John Weller and Barron Crawford weighing a red wolf pup

Middle and right photos: In May 2002 two captive-born red wolf pups were placed into a den containing two wild-born pups. Frequent monitoring of the den site showed that the mother wolf had accepted the new pups as her own.

nurture hope for achieving milestones in red wolf recovery and for increasing the chances that this rare and beautiful predator will survive in the wild. ■

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The North Carolina red wolf experimental population area. Zone 1 of the area is coyote- and hybrid-free. In Zone 2 any known hybrids have been sterilized so they cannot produce offspring, and in Zone 3 the number of hybrids has been reduced.