

WOLF SPECIALIST GROUP



NEWSLETTER



Species Survival Commission
International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources

June 6, 1989

Dear Colleague:

This is our first Wolf Specialist Group Newsletter. I hope you will find it to be informative. Such a newsletter depends on material submitted by the membership, so please provide newsworthy information on wolves in your geographic area to either our chairman or directly to me, Warren Parker (see attached membership list and addresses). I hope to send out several newsletters each year.

First, from our chairman, Dave Mech:

Meetings

Alaska. Both the minutes and the abstracts of our August 1988 meeting have finally been mailed to all members. If you are a member and did not receive a copy, please write Dave Mech.

Most of the resolutions passed at the meeting have been sent, and the others will be sent shortly.

Norway. The next meeting will be held on September 8, 1989, in conjunction with the International Union of Game Biologists meeting in Trondheim, Norway. Partial funding for travel to the meeting has been made available through Svein Myerberget.

Each member should now have received a notice of the minimum amount of travel funding available to you for the Trondheim meeting. If you did not receive that notice from Dave Mech, please contact him as soon as possible.

Minnesota. Our 1990 meeting is tentatively planned for Minnesota in April 1990. At least 50 percent of the funding has been raised by the International Wolf Center, and they hope to have the rest soon.

First Phase of International Wolf Center

The first phase in the development of the International Wolf Center officially opened its doors on May 27 at the Voyageur Visitor Center

in Ely, Minnesota. The permanent home of the International Wolf Center is expected to open at the site of the Voyageur Visitor Center in 1992. The 22,000 square foot building will be home to the award winning "Wolves and Humans" exhibit built by the Science Museum of Minnesota. During the past two years, work has centered on the important educational component of the Wolf Center.

Through the Wolf Center's close affiliation with Vermilion Community College, credit and non-credit courses are offered about the wolf, its prey, and habitat. The unique "Wolf Odyssey" programs allow those with a desire for a first hand field experience to view the wolf from the air, participate in howling expeditions, hike, ski, snowshoe, or use dogsled trips to view wolf kills, wolf tracks, and other signs.

Alaska: Bob Stephenson

February and March 1989 have been a time of wolf predation rate studies in Alaska and the Yukon. Intensive studies of wolf predation have been, or are being, conducted in four areas, including the northern Yukon (by Yukon Renewable Resources), Gates of the Arctic National Park-Central Brooks Range (a cooperative National Park Service-Alaska Department of Fish and Game study), the northern foothills of the Alaska Range (ADF&G), and Denali National Park (National Park Service). These studies involve locating several radio-marked packs from one to three times daily and backtracking between locations for periods of about 30 days.

The weather has been extraordinarily cooperative, at least in the three Alaska studies, and it appears that a continuous record of the activities of the packs involved will be obtained. While I'll leave it to the individual investigators to report on their findings in detail, I can say that some tremendously interesting things have been observed in all studies. Accurate records of predation rates, prey characteristics (remains of most kills have been collected), prey selection relative to prey abundance, and wolf-prey interactions have been obtained. The major prey species available in the Alaska study areas are caribou, moose, and Dall sheep with relative abundance of the three species varying widely among pack home ranges and areas.

While this information is just tantalizing, I thought it might be worth telling people interested in wolf ecology that they can look forward to some detailed accounts of wolf-prey interactions during late winter (1989). If you need further details, please call (907/456-5156).

Arabia: Prof. Iyad A. Nader

Wolves (Canis lupus) are present throughout the Arabian peninsula. They are found in the high mountains of the west and the southwest, in the arid areas, and in the coastal regions. However, nowhere are they

common. Two subspecies are recognized in the peninsula--the larger northern C. L. pallipes (Sykes 1831) and the smaller southern C. L. arabs (Pocock 1934).

The Arabian wolf population in Saudi Arabia seems to be stable. They are more widespread than previously believed. The Arabian wolf is a solitary animal and may hunt in pairs; however, it rarely forms packs. Occasionally they attack sheep and rarely shepherds. This causes some resentment among rural people which leads to unnecessary killings. Unconfirmed reports indicate that some wolves are rabid. An investigation into this problem will be undertaken very soon by the staff of the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD). It is noteworthy that the wolf in Arabia is on the Commission's list of protected animals and "Do Not Kill These Animals" appears on the Commission's wall poster.

Canada: Dr. L. N. Carbyn

The Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA) is planning to pay a cash incentive to trappers as a means of taking more wolves in that province. The incentive has pitted protectionists against hunters and some biologists who contend that wolf control is essential if declining elk herds are to recover. Presently, the Province allows trappers to take 1,200 wolves each year, but because of low prices for pelts, trappers are targeting other species. The AFGA is trying to raise \$100,000 in a membership drive so they can pay trappers \$150 over and above what they are getting for a wolf pelt.

Lu has co-authored several recent papers that may be of interest. These are:

Carbyn, L. N. and T. Trottier. 1988. Descriptions of wolf attacks on bison calves in Wood Buffalo National Park. *Journal of the Arctic Institute of North America*. Vol. 41, No. 4: 297-302.

-----, 1987. Responses of bison on their calving grounds to predation by wolves in Wood Buffalo National Park. *Canadian Journal of Zoology*. Vol. 65, No. 8: 2072-2078.

Italy: Dr. Luigi Boitani

A most significant bit of news is that the European Parliament adopted a resolution on February 17, 1989, calling on member states to affirm that wolves have a legitimate right to exist in the wild. The resolution further calls on European governments to 1) limit development in remaining wolf habitat, 2) develop a system for compensating herders for livestock losses attributable to wolves, 3) prepare a global wolf conservation strategy for every member state to ensure survival of the species and minimize conflicts with human activities, 4) provide for full legal protection that is overseen by

means enforceable at the national level, 5) provide for information and education mandates, 6) provide for reintroductions of natural prey species, 7) to provide for control of feral stray dog populations, and 8) to establish captive breeding programs to preserve populations whose numbers are already so depleted as to invite the risk of excessive inbreeding or extinction.

The resolution then calls on the Commission to draw up and fund an emergency Community Wolf Conservation Program with a view, among other things, to setting up a permanent study group which would be responsible for compiling figures and information on the presence and status of wolves in the various regions, arrange exchanges of experiences in the fields of management and conservation, work with the scientific backing and the support of the IUCN-SSC Wolf Specialist Group, and provide the technical backup required to resolve the conflicts associated with wolf conservation in the member states.

Norway: Dr. Svein Myrberget

An interview investigation in Norway was initiated to find out how much people were willing to pay to protect large carnivorous mammals, including the wolf. Two groups of 1,000 persons were interviewed after being given a variety of information in advance. Ten percent of all persons interviewed were of the opinion that the wolf should be totally eliminated; 24 percent believed that the wolf population should be reduced; 49 percent desired an increase, and 17 percent had no opinion. "Reducing" wolf numbers is unrealistic since the total Scandinavian population in recent years is about 12 animals, including young.

Most of the livestock damages attributed to the wolf in Norway involve sheep and lambs, because wolves seldom occur in reindeer husbandry districts. In 1986 applications for compensation for wolf-related losses of 251 sheep and lambs were registered and livestock owners were compensated by the government. The same year compensation was paid for 1,002 sheep killed or assumed killed by bears and 2,690 by wolverines. Relatively speaking and on a countrywide basis, the wolf is only responsible for insignificant damages. The annual expense incurred per household as a result of damage by the before mentioned three large carnivorous mammals are about six Norwegian kroner (1 U.S. dollar). The survey indicated that on the average each household was willing to pay 200 kroner annually to protect these species. One difficulty with statistics of this kind is that they only reflect attitudes toward one specific problem.

A translation of some chapters from the Russian book "Volk" (The Wolf) published by M. Pavlov (Moscow 1982) was recently printed as a pamphlet in Norway. It included information about the wolf's diet and interactions with humans. Several tales related horrifying incidences of wolves killing domestic livestock and humans during and just after World War II.

Publication of the pamphlet led to public outcry in all Norwegian newspapers and protests from nature conservation organizations. As a result, the pamphlet was withdrawn from publication. Although some of the stories may have been based on facts (Bibikow 1988), none of them have any relevance for Norwegian management of the wolf (or for that matter wolf management in the Soviet Union today).

This situation demonstrated that when publishing "touchy" information about threatened species, great care should be taken to control how it is presented. One cannot ignore the problems, but the actual situation should not be described in a manner which may have drastic negative consequences for such an important matter. Attention by the media resulted in a far greater public awareness of horrifying rumors about the wolf than otherwise would have been the case.

In July 1988 a young male wolf was killed in southern Norway. This animal had walked away from the small reproductive nucleus of wolves living in the border areas between Norway and Sweden. Just before it was killed, the male wolf had killed about 100 sheep and lambs. The sheepowner's neighbor accidentally came across the wolf and shot it. The wolf is totally protected in Norway. However, sheep and reindeer owners may kill wolves in "self-defense" when a wolf is threatening domestic livestock. This incident also resulted in a comprehensive and heated discussion in the press.

The case has led to a reevaluation of regulations regarding destruction of wolves in "self-defense." The incident also illustrates problems associated with wolf management in Scandinavia. Although we may be able to control conflicts between the interests of livestock owners and the wolf in vital habitat supporting nuclear reproductive units, young animals may stray over large areas. There are several examples which confirm this behavior by young wolves. If a young wolf wanders into an area with grazing livestock and is responsible for extensive local damage, the chances of its survival are minimal.

In conclusion, general acceptance of the importance of the survival of all species, including the wolf, is an increasing trend in Norway. However, this change in attitude does not necessarily help the wolf when the few individuals left remain vulnerable to being legally or illegally killed. One method for increasing the chances of wolf survival is to find measures for reducing potential damage in prime wolf habitat and habitat often visited by straying individuals. Any information campaign should be designed to reach those districts and activities most vulnerable to damage from wolves (see Naess & Mysterud 1987). The Norwegian government has now established a political commission to try to solve such problems in the most heavily affected district.

References

- Bibikow, D.I. 1988: Der Wolf. - Neue Brechen-Bücherei 581.
Wittenburg Lutherstedt DDR. (In German).
- Naess, A. and Mysterud, I. 1987: Philosophy of wolf policies I:
General principles and preliminary exploration of selected norms.
Conserv. Biol. 1:22-24.

United States: Warren Parker (Red Wolf)

Spring, of course, is whelping time for the red wolf, and this year we have had at least moderate success. The mainland reintroduction site at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina has yielded only one successful litter of four pups whelped on May 11, 1989. Another female had pups, but none survived. On Bulls Island, South Carolina, five female pups were whelped on May 14 and are doing very well as of this date (June 1). On our other island propagation project at Horn Island, Mississippi, seven pups were whelped on May 6 and these, too, are doing well. The captive breeding project at Point Defiance Zoo in Tacoma, Washington, has expanded its program this year. Mr. Roland Smith is now devoting practically all of his time to the red wolf captive project. As a result, six new zoos in the United States have agreed to hold red wolves for captive breeding purposes. The expansion of the captive breeding project is significant and most critical in preventing further genetic drift in the remaining population.

Several island-born red wolves were captured in January of this year and taken to Alligator River Refuge where they were released into the wild. This is the first step in the effort to propagate young wolves on islands and release the animals into a mainland environment. All of the island-born pups are caught at about 10 weeks of age and Telonics implant transmitters are surgically inserted into the abdominal cavity. These small transmitters allow tracking of the young animals until they are 8 months or so old. At this age they are captured and taken to a mainland project. A conventional large mammal transmitter collar is then fitted prior to release. Battery life of the implant transmitter is about 16 months, and to date, they have proven to be extremely reliable and practical.

A new Red Wolf Recovery Plan is out for review. This completely revised document is unique in that it incorporates the captive breeding aspects and needs as defined by the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums (AAZPA). Included is a chapter on management of small populations and strategies for enhancing the genetic vigor of the remaining red wolf population. At the moment, there are only 84 adult red wolves in existence. The recovery plan calls for approximately 300 wolves maintained in captivity and about 200 in the wild. At the moment I am working on a new island propagation project and a major mainland reintroduction. Please let

me know if any member of the Wolf Group is interested in receiving a copy of the Red Wolf Recovery-Captive Breeding Plan when it is finalized.

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