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Science and Scholarship Abused, and the Counter-Productive “Conservation” of Wolves in North America and Europe

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ABSTRACT: Although science forms the basis of wildlife conservation in the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, advocacy and inadequate scholarship have led to conservation legislation that is destroying the wolf as a species. “Wolf science” is flawed due to the denial of historical information about wolves, ignoring how wolves explore new prey, ignoring long-standing research on the social organization and its changes in wolves, ignoring hybridization as a cause of the genomic extinction, the use of genetic data without a taxonomic verification of specimen, misuse of mathematics, and espousing meaningless statistics. Wolves cannot be conserved as a species in settled landscapes. So called wolf conservation in North America and in Europe is in need of re-evaluation, as it is destroying a genuine canid species.

KEY WORDS: advocacy, *Canis lupus*, conservation, Europe, genetics, North America, predation, wolf

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Science-based wildlife management is one of the hallmarks of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (Geist et al. 2001). However, such must not be confused with *advocacy*. And it is advocacy, not science or disinterested scholarship, that is all too apparent behind the legislation of various jurisdictions in Europe and North America which protect wolves (*Canis lupus*) totally. It is proclaimed that wolves are totally harmless to people, and that wolves are needed to restore the “balance of nature”. Ecosystems, that is, interacting populations of diverse life forms, run by positive feed-back, and as such cannot, in principle, “balance”. Only systems running on negative feedback can do so. Advocacy denies or belittles the damage to livestock caused by wolves or the dangers from diseases carried by wolves, especially the dreaded hydatid disease. Advocacy sees the wildlife of a country as totally expendable for the consumption by wolves to the exclusion of hunting. However, it does not foresee that settled landscapes doom wolves to extinction as a species. On top of the suffering wolves can cause to people and the damage they do to livestock and wildlife, this type of legislation also destroys the gray wolf. It is a case of good people with good intentions going the wrong way and producing result exactly counter to their intentions.

A case history: That misguided wolf conservation kills humans is illustrated by the Kenton Carnegie tragedy in Saskatchewan (Geist 2008, 2009), which, I concluded, would not have happened in British Columbia. In this province wolves may be taken, within limits, by any licensed hunter, while in Saskatchewan wolves were reserved for holders of trap lines. In British Columbia, wolves becoming conditioned to feeding on garbage, as well as any rabid wolf, or injured or aging wolf incapable of hunting, become visible and thus would be quickly eliminated by hunters. Such would be illegal in Saskatchewan; if the law had allowed hunters to take out wolves feeding on garbage, as is allowed in British Columbia, Kenton Carnegie would be alive and well. Although I pointed this out to reporters, it was not picked up, while it was withheld from the coroner’s jury that dealt with the

Kenton Carnegie tragedy.

What is present in the name of science about wolves is often void of critical scholarship, yet has been successfully translated into policy espoused by various wildlife conservation organizations and is enshrined in law. It has led to the expected – and ongoing – damage to wildlife and livestock, and was likely the cause of death for at least three well-educated believers in the myth of the “harmless wolf” (Geist 2007). This is currently leading to the destruction of wolves as a species, both in North America and in Europe.

Here, I enumerate and discuss the flaws that form the basis of today’s wolf advocacy and wolf management policy in North America and Europe:

1. ***The total denial of all historical information about wolves as unverifiable.*** Anyone denying this body of historical information this is either too lazy to inform himself, or is in some way intellectually impaired, or is incapable of dealing with and understanding scholarly disciplines that deal with the past and their sophisticated methods of asserting validity. This denial has had catastrophic consequences, as it led to the flawed conception of the “harmless wolf.” Circumstantial evidence indicates that at least three people, two very well educated, believed in the “harmless wolf” as a fact established by science and were consequently killed by wolves. Kenton Carnegie is not the only victim of “harmless wolves”. So was 24-year-old wildlife biologist Trisha Wyman, who was killed on April 18, 1996 by a captive wolf pack in Ontario. Professor Erich Klinghammer of Wolf Park was called in as an expert witness to examine the Wyman case. In a phone conversation, he reported that there was great surprise at her death, as “wolves are not supposed to attack people.” He was stunned at the ignorance. Ms. Wyman had visited the park previously and spent some time studying the wolves. She was given the dream job of looking after and interpreting the wolves. She lasted three days! The third case is of the 30-year-old lady

zookeeper killed in the wolf pen of Kolmarden Djurpark (The Kolmarden Zoo) outside the city of Norrköping, Sweden, on June 17, 2012, about 11 AM. The pack, which she had raised, turned on her. There had been previous similar incidents: a captive pack of 9 wolf hybrids, kept as pets, killed its owner, Sandra L. Piovesan, of Salem Township, Pennsylvania, on July 17, 2006. Linda Wilson Fuoco and Chico Harlan wrote in the Pittsburgh *Post-Gazette* that Ms. Piovesan treated her wolves like children and said as much when neighbors asked about them; Ms. Piovesan said that “they (the wolf-hybrids) give me unqualified love.”

Independently, I came to much the same conclusions as did Mikhail P. Pavlov, member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, who had published his findings 25 years earlier (Pavlov 1982). Pavlov's work on wolves is poorly known in the West. The Norwegian translation, due to pressure by environmentalists, was retracted and destroyed. That led the translator to publish relevant parts of Pavlov's work in Swedish (Pålsson 2003). Chapter 12 of Pavlov's book was translated into English by Dr. Leonid Baskin, his wife Valentina, and the U.S. biologists Mark McNay and Patric Valkenburg. However, they were not able to publish it. Consequently, I published it as Appendix A in the book *Wolves in Russia* by Will N. Graves (2007), which I edited. I am very glad that much of the material and conclusions in our book was independently substantiated by the Professor Christopher Stubbe (2008). The extensive interaction of wolves with humans in human history is illustrated, for instance, by the large number of proverbs and sayings pertaining to wolves in Russian culture, as discussed in Graves (2007), and the more than 3,000 deaths by wolves in France as discussed by Jean-Marc Moriceau (2007).

2. ***Ignoring how wolves explore new prey, and therefore ignoring crucial ethological observations on wolves.***

For lack of a better term, I call the manner in which wolves (and coyotes) explore a new prey the “Escalation Model.” Hardship or familiarity with humans forces or causes wolves to explore new prey, which can include humans. Wolves and coyotes do this by prolonged visual observation, during which over weeks they approach the new prey closer and closer. This is followed by exploratory contacts such as sniffing skin and clothing or licking such, followed by an exploratory attack, follow by a serious attack. I observed this escalation in good part personally and added relevant observations of others, presenting my findings for the first time in 2005 as the keynote speaker at a symposium of The Wildlife Society entitled *Wildlife Habituation: Advances in Understanding, and Management Applications* (Geist 2005). I discovered subsequently that the very same observation had been made on coyotes targeting humans in suburban environments and had been published 6 years earlier by Baker and Timm (1998). In short, the “big wolf” and the “little wolf” explore humans as prey in the same manner. Health problems prevented me from publishing the paper I presented in Madison, but I inserted the “Escalation Model” as Appendix B in the

book by Graves (2007:195-197). To show just how far researchers were ahead on the matter of coyote aggression towards humans, I point here to a paper by Timm et al. (2004); please note the dates! We have here the absurdity that while students of the “little wolf” long ago acknowledged that it will prey on people, given the opportunity, and took constructive steps to mitigate such, students of the “big wolf” denied that wolves had any interest in humans. Note that wolves reveal their interest in humans as prey long, long before they attack (Graves 2007:196).

3. ***Ignoring long-standing research on the social organization and its changes in wolves, including the social relationships which captive, but human-socialized wolves develop with humans.***

The idea that free-living wolves were harmless jumped to captive wolves. Doug Pimlott's passionate writings that wolves were harmless were based in good part on his personal experience raising *young* wolves. He died before his research matured with *adult* wolves. This type of research was carried on primarily by the late Professor Erich Klinghammer with socialized wolves in Wolf Park, Battle Ground, Indiana, as well as by Professors Harry and Martha Frank of University of Michigan-Flint, with home-kept wolves. Their collective experience was published in Frank (1987). They found that *adult* wolves were intensely rank-sensitive, and thus observed companions (wolves or humans), and that eventually they tried to better their rank via attacks on more dominant individuals (wolves or humans). Revolts within packs at Wolf Park included daughters ganging up and killing their mother, and sons ganging up and killing their father. Since socialized wolves regarded human keepers as companions, these wolves also targeted their keepers, who had to subdue such wolves. Consequently, anybody with a cold or flu was not permitted to meet the wolves. They developed protocols to protect keepers when they were attacked by wolves (Wolf Park 1999). Most remarkable is the paper by Klinghammer and Goodman (1987), which contains a section (pp. 53-55) entitled “How to save a person from attack”. Early on in my research I noticed that this and other vital research (e.g., Woolpy and Ginsburg 1967, Coppinger and Coppinger 2001) was not cited or seemed unknown by main-line wolf researchers or proclaimers of the wolves’ “gentle nature”. Ignoring this research ignores once again the social behavior of wolves, fosters the myth of the “harmless wolf”, and leads to “surprises” by wolves, including lethal ones (e.g., see Rosenfeld 2012).

4. ***Ignoring hybridization as a cause of the genomic extinction of wolves (or other canids), and ignoring the differences between dogs and wolves as different organisms.***

Wolves cannot be kept in settled landscapes, because of the impossibility of keeping wolves and dogs apart, and the destruction of the wolf genome by creeping hybridization (Monzon et al. 2014). While I whole-heartedly agree that there should be no keeping of wolves and wolf hybrids as pets, the sheer size of the “wolf-dog” industry as well as illicit releases of wolf

hybrids will insure further erosion of the genome of free-ranging wolves. Moreover, how is officialdom to know of wolf hybrids unless wolf numbers are strictly and closely regulated so that plenty of specimens are available for testing? Furthermore, from my experience identifying wolves or dogs from photos sent my way from Europe, I have serious doubts that, with a few exceptions, European wolf specialists can currently distinguish wolf from dog.

Unless limits are set early to wolf numbers – and I see no hint of that – wolf populations will expand to destroy populations of natural prey and turn to livestock and humans. Do wolf proponents really think that one can significantly keep wolves and dogs apart by minimizing the number of free-ranging dogs? Even if they have some success in doing so, are they not aware that lone wolves themselves seek out dogs? Do they really think that lone wolf females in heat will desist from visiting suburbs and farms looking for a mate? Do they think that chained farm dogs will not copulate with a female wolf in heat at night? Has nobody had the experience of holding a young very large male dog in training while it comes in contact with an estrus female canid? I had a young male Bouvier de Flandre on a leash while we came across a small wolf track in the snow – and the Bouvier went wild! He then weighed only about a hundred pounds. I had my hands full! An amorous male wolf threatened my wife and made her flee into our house when he approached an estrus hunting dog, a greater Muensterlander, in an enclosure. No neighborhood male dog had been that bold! In short, lone wolves having a desire to mate will intrude deep into human habitation. There is no way to effectively segregate wolves from dogs in settled landscapes. Moreover, there is no way to protect wildlife from marauding packs of dogs, either. All efforts to make wolves compatible with settled landscapes are a waste of time and energy. All marauding canids in settled landscape need to be removed.

This raises the question how to conserve wolves as a species. What we know for certain is that they need to be kept away from dogs. In the first instance, that means that wolves and other large predators need to be kept where the public has no entry. And such areas need to be large. The very first step is to negotiate internationally for keeping large predators on military and atomic reserves. I doubt that national parks are suitable, because the tourist lobby will balk. Secondly, means and ways need to be found to closely control wolf populations in such wolf reserves to insure that wolves do not run out of prey and leave the reserves for settled landscapes. Well-fed wolves will cause the least problems. Severe trapping and predator control in 20th century kept North American wolves out of settled landscapes, eliminated agricultural losses and disease transmission, and retained their genetic integrity, while attacks on humans were unheard of. Moreover, the extinction via hybridization is not mere hypothesis, but reality in eastern North America, where western coyotes, gray wolves, eastern wolves, and dogs have hybridized to form the “coy wolf”, a nondescript mongrel. Current U.S. wolf conservation policies, if one can call

them such, insure the “coy-wolfing” of all of North America, destroying thereby both the “big wolf” and then “little wolf” as species.

5. ***Genetic databases, so called, without a taxonomic verification of specimen, are misleading and totally worthless.*** A withering critique of the DNA database for wolves in Finland was written by Professor Kaj Granlund (Granlund 2013). In essence, laboratories doing research on wolf DNA failed to do due diligence on specimens supplied to them and accepted the word of their suppliers as to the identity of the specimen. Consequently, the DNA database is corrupted by inclusions of wolf/dog hybrids, and of late, by the inadvertent inclusion of jackals and even foxes into the “wolf DNA”. Specimens identified genetically as Italian wolves happen to have paws identical to those of golden jackals (*Canis aureus*), and jackal paws are morphologically quite distinct from those of wolves. Identical jackal paw morphology has been now noted in Swiss and French “wolves”. DNA testing based on fecal samples gathered in the field has introduced fox DNA into the “wolf database” (pers. comm., K. Granlund). The jackal may play a role analogous to that of the coyote in North America, hybridizing with wolves. Any paper dealing with canid genetics that ignores hybridization should be suspect.
6. ***Misuse of mathematics feigns certainty and integrity where there is none.*** Beware of the inappropriate use of comparative morphometrics in *taxonomic* studies of wolves. Please note what I said in Geist (1992:275): “A fatal flaw in much large-mammal taxonomy is the use of comparative morphometrics as a taxonomic tool. Comparative morphometrics of crania or skeletons of free-living populations can no more be used to measure taxonomic (genetic) differences than a rubber band can be used to measure distance. Every set of comparable measurements conceals genetic, epistatic, environmental and statistical variation. That is, the gross variation is a mixture of different types of variation, within which the genetic variance is undefined. It remains undefinable, despite various approximations. Comparative morphometrics as a taxonomic tool is logically flawed. It confuses phenotype with genotype, analogy with homology, ecotype with taxon, and does not reveal the taxonomic and evolutionary differences between the populations compared. It reveals only differences, the origins of which remain obscured. This flaw is not uncommon in other fields of biology when quantitative comparisons between populations are used to bolster evolutionary analysis. Such comparisons are futile if the proportion of variance attributable to heredity is unknowable. The closer the relationship between populations of a given form, the more speculative must be the conclusions about evolutionary relationships, because large phenotypic differences can arise from closely related genotypes in different environments. Taxonomic or evolutionary differences in close relatives should be studied experimentally, provided different variables affecting ontogeny are subject to effective control.”

The enormous capacity of wolves to disperse over great distances, and the ongoing expulsions of wolves from packs, insures that the North American wolves form a very large interbreeding population swarm with weak subspecies regional differentiation at best (Cronin et al. 2015). Body size will vary with environmental quality, and is of virtually no taxonomic significance.

7. **Espousing meaningless statistics such as “*Chances of wolves attacking people is very small.*”** This is a common statement, but one void of meaning. Totally missing is an assessment of when free-living wolves are dangerous and when not. And yet that’s what one can rightly expect from a professional. As a rule of thumb, well-fed wolves that rarely meet people are not dangerous. Well-fed wolves that habituate to people, however, are very dangerous. The unmistakable sign of danger is wolves standing or sitting, and carefully, systematically observing people. This is the beginning of wolf targeting people as prey. That’s the information that needs to be provided, and not some assurance that wolves rarely strike and it’s OK to proceed hiking as normal.

In the 20th century, circumpolar wolves were not endangered. However, conservation attempts in Europe and North America, based on advocacy, are driving this species to extinction. A thorough re-consideration of how to preserve wolves for the future is overdue.

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