



Wolves and Humans in Glen Affric: Public attitudes and knowledge

by Kevin Cummings



Glen Affric, Scotland

Photo: R Morley

Kevin Cummings is Conservation Officer at Glamis Castle Estate in Angus, Scotland. Having previously worked as a volunteer at the Scottish Deer Centre, he completed his MSc in Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in January 2013, with a thesis on public attitudes and knowledge about wolves in the Glen Affric area of the Scottish Highlands. Here Kevin outlines some of the main findings of his research and recounts his experiences carrying out interviews with local people.

The reintroduction of large predators to an area where they have become extirpated is a very complex issue. The Highlands of Scotland is an area where the possibility of reintroducing a predator such as wolf or lynx has been tentatively raised from time to time. The ecological arguments both for and against this idea are equally complex and both possess some validity.

Apart from the ecological impact of such a reintroduction, there is also the question of how the local communities would react. Seeking an answer is what took me 130 miles to the Glen Affric area of the Highlands, to a small village called Cannich. I would call a dilapidated caravan there my home for a spell during one of the wettest summers on record while I conducted the research for my Master of Science degree in Conservation and Management at Edinburgh Napier University.

It is widely accepted that when the subject of reintroducing a predator to an area is raised, livestock farmers and hunting estate owners tend to have a negative opinion towards it. I decided I would try and discover how those not directly involved in farming and hunting feel a wolf reintroduction could affect their livelihood.

For eight days I interviewed people in Drumnadrochit, Fort Augustus, Beaully and some

of the smaller towns and villages in the area. I would say that there were, without doubt some memorable experiences when interviewing people on such a controversial subject. One grizzled retired farmer emphatically informed me that I had five seconds to get away from him and another gave an indication of where I could “shove” my wolves. However these encounters were few and far between and mostly I found that people were more than willing to discuss the subject and showed great interest.

Interestingly, 70% of the people interviewed stated that they would like to see wolves reintroduced to the Scottish Highlands. The main reason for this was the likely increase in tourism that having wolves in the area could bring. Tourism is an industry which 96% of the respondents stated as being economically important to the area and many described as vital to their livelihood.

Another reason cited by a number of people was the potential for controlling the deer numbers, which have been highlighted in the media as being far too high. The currently preferred methods of culling to reduce deer populations have yet to be proved an effective and cost efficient form of control.

I thought that the image of wolves roaming the wilds of Scotland might frighten those living in the Highlands despite the threat to humans by wolves in Europe being greatly exaggerated, with no reliable accounts of wolf attacks on humans being recorded in the whole of the 20th century. I felt some of these fears may have been manifested

through bad publicity of wolves and a lack of knowledge regarding the understanding of wolf ecology. I put the question to the Glen Affric community of how frightened they would feel if wolves were to be reintroduced. The majority of people indicated they would not be frightened at all and when asked if wolf attacks on people are common, they answered that they were not. Obviously the local community had a greater grasp of the subject than I had given them credit for.

These answers indicate that there is perhaps a good level of ecological knowledge regarding wolves in this area. The majority of people sampled also felt that wolves belong in Scotland. Add to this the 66% of respondents stating that they would like to learn more about wolves and it is not inconceivable that this Highland community might be receptive to a well planned experimental reintroduction.

While analysing the results of my survey I found that socio demographic factors such as age and gender had little effect on people’s responses. The only significant issue was people aged 56+ were more against the idea of reintroducing wolves to Scotland than those aged below 56.

With reports of dangerously low populations of Mexican wolves, red wolves and Ethiopian wolves, and the controversial delisting of grey wolves in many states in the USA, a reintroduction of this apex predator would be a shining light at a difficult time for large predators around the globe.

The potential benefits of reintroducing a keystone predator like the wolf to the Highlands of Scotland



Photo: Peter Cairns/Northshots

are more than just the financial savings gained by them controlling the deer population. With a control on deer numbers we see potential benefits to the reforestation of the Caledonian forest, which suffers from browsing by deer, and increased provision of carrion for various mesopredators and scavenging birds. The possible cascading effects through different trophic levels that the reintroduction of wolves could bring to the Scottish Highlands are wide and varying but will remain unrealised if support for such a project is not gained from the people that would be most directly affected by it.

For those people not particularly interested in the benefits reintroduction could bring to the Highland ecology, there are the human benefits of reduced deer numbers resulting in fewer deer crossing roads and reducing the hundreds of road traffic collisions resulting in human injury and material damage each year.

One of the aims of my research was to discover where respondents gained most of their knowledge regarding wildlife and the natural world. Unsurprisingly most people answered that television documentaries were their main source. Worryingly 30% of people stated that “word of mouth” was

where they receive most of their knowledge. The danger of this is wrong information regarding certain species becoming thought of as “fact”. Schools and talks and presentations were only cited by one person as a source of knowledge which suggests that perhaps more should be done to try and encourage children from a young age to find an interest in the nature and the natural world.

From my discussions with the people of the Glen Affric area and the results of my study, I feel that there is a genuine interest in the subject of predator reintroduction. I think that if similar results were to be found in other Highland areas there would be significant benefit in providing these communities with more information regarding predator reintroduction.

The Scottish Highlands provide real opportunity to support a predator population and raising awareness of the topic of reintroduction and making it into a national debate should be the priority of those who would love to bring back an iconic species that humans have removed from the beautiful Scottish wilderness.

Kevin Cummings writes a blog about conservation at Glamis Castle at glamisranger.blogspot.co.uk

Editorial



Welcome to the summer edition of WOLVES AND HUMANS. We had intended to produce an issue dedicated to a issue currently high on the agenda of those responsible for managing wolf populations - hunting of wolves. We hoped to have representatives from both sides arguing their case for and against this controversial aspect of wolf management, but all the people we approached to share their views on the pro-hunting side declined to participate, so rather than produce a one-sided feature on this important subject, we will try to return with a balanced issue exploring the issue in detail, later in the year. In the meantime, if you have any experience related to this or would like to share your views, please get in touch through the usual channels...

...which are changing: Wolves and Humans is moving office after twelve years here in Somerset. From the 10th August 2013 our new address will be:

Hill Crest
Longdown
Exeter
Devon
EX6 7SR

The telephone number will change to: 01392 811782. Our email address will remain unchanged: info@wolvesandhumans.org. We look forward to bringing you the next issue in the Autumn once we have settled into our new home.

Update:

Wolves in France



Photo: Angelo Gandolfi

The shooting in June this year of a female wolf by wildlife officials in the commune of Duranus, in the foothills of the Alps-Maritimes in southern France, marks a new era for French wolf management. The number of wolves permitted to be killed to restrict the growth of the population in France has recently been increased from 11 a year to 24 by the Environment and Agricultural ministries. According to some sources, wolves, estimated to number around 250 in the country, have been responsible for the deaths of 690 sheep and goats since the beginning of this year.

The revised quota is part of the new National Action Plan for the Wolf 2013-2017, published by the French government in May this year. The Action Plan aims to guarantee the protection of wolves in France whilst restricting their impact on livestock breeding and biodiversity. Wolves are fully protected in France under European law, including the Bern Convention and the Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna of 1992, but under Article 16 of the Directive countries can derogate from this protection to prevent damage to livestock if there is no satisfactory alternative, and it is this derogation that has been used to allow the shooting of wolves

in the past. In addition to regulation shooting, there have also been incidents of illegal poisoning, the most recent in Mercantour National Park in February this year. Illegal killing is deducted from the number of wolves allowed to be shot by officials.

The increased quota appears to be in response to growing calls for wolves to be eradicated from the country. This opposition is mainly from livestock owners; in Causse Méjean, a collective of farmers have campaigned to have wolves removed from the department of Lozère. They have received support from some surprising sources; in 2012 the annual general meeting of the Cevennes National Park voted unanimously that wolves were “*not compatible with the stock-raising techniques used on park territory*”. The Park’s president also stated that the Park’s approach to stock-raising “*produces biodiversity. The presence of wolves would jeopardise that biodiversity*”.

Since wolves returned to France in 1992, subsidised preventive measures against livestock depredation have been introduced, including livestock guarding dogs, gathering flocks together in pens at night, and increased presence of shepherds on summer mountain pastures, with

cabins provided for shelter and sleeping. However, farmers claim this has disrupted traditional pastoral practices. Negative effects include restricting flocks to areas around cabins, increasing erosion and causing localised increased nitrogen levels where sheep are penned at night, which may affect the mountain ecology and local water sources; livestock is prevented from grazing at night, and the extra distance travelled from pasture to night pens increases energy requirements; and there is extra work and longer hours for shepherds, affecting their family life. It is also claimed that the presence of dogs creates tension with other mountain users.

The new Action Plan has been criticised by the French Association for the Protection of Wild Animals (ASPAS), and Ferus, an organisation dedicated to conservation of wolves, bears and lynx in France, who point out that mortality caused by wolves is only a small percentage of total livestock losses and that shooting wolves may disrupt packs and lead to dispersal to new areas where livestock may be present. They propose more far-reaching changes to livestock husbandry and an increase in the use of preventive measures to protect stock, and draw comparisons with the situation in neighbouring Italy and Spain, which support wolf populations numbering between 1,500 and 2,500.

In an open letter to the prefect of the Alps-Maritime, ASPAS, Ferus and other conservation groups claimed that the female wolf recently killed

was probably the alpha female of the pack in that area and was likely to have young pups that would not survive without her at that time of year. They called for the pups to be included in the quota for 2013, and criticised the authorities for lack of transparency over control measures and for breaching a provision in the Action Plan that interventions in the wolf population should not affect a functioning population in areas of permanent wolf presence.

Conservationists have also opposed any control measures being carried out in national parks, pointing out that core areas of France's national parks, which comprise less than 1% of the country, are the only areas where wildlife is strictly protected.

There are now 29 identified zones of permanent wolf presence (ZPP) in France, with 19 packs identified by a network of trained field experts responsible for monitoring, with a minimum winter population of 89-94 wolves, an increase on the 68 counted in 2009/10. Wolves can now be found in much of the south-east of France, with small populations in the Pyrenees and Vosges massifs.

The challenge facing the government-appointed National Wolf Group, appointed in 2012 to draft the latest Action Plan, is to manage a growing wolf population whilst maintaining the livelihood of France's mountain farmers.



Photo: Angelo Gandolfi

Update:

Experts debate action on falling Isle Royale wolf numbers

According to latest monitoring results, there are just eight wolves left on Isle Royale, in Lake Superior, home of one of the longest running wolf ecology and predator-prey studies in the world. Researchers believe that genetic inbreeding in the population has resulted in weaknesses, including spinal abnormalities, that have reduced survival rates. With so few wolves on the island, the moose population has almost doubled in the last three years.

In public discussions and forums, experts are debating whether to intervene and save the population from potential extinction by introducing new, genetically distinct wolves onto the island. The likelihood of natural reinforcement is low; the original wolves arrived on the island across a rare ice bridge in the late 1940s. Wolf biologist David Mech, argues against intervention, and believes that the low numbers are a natural result of an earlier drop in moose numbers, and that genetic abnormalities are only present at roughly the same level as mainland wolves. He points out that the wolf population has recovered from just 12 individuals in the past without intervention, and

believes that ice bridges will reoccur with extreme weather fluctuations caused by climate change, allowing natural repopulation.

Wilderness advocates support allowing natural processes to prevail, claiming that the designation of 98% of Isle Royale National Park as wilderness means that managers must refrain from manipulation, and that wolves and other species periodically come and go from other islands in the Great Lakes without calls for intervention.

Rolf Peterson, who has led wolf-moose studies on the island longer than anyone else, believes that 'genetic rescue' by introducing one or two new wolves, will help prevent moose over-browsing causing irreversible damage to the island ecosystem, as well as allowing the long-running research to continue. Another option is to allow the current wolf population to die out, and then reintroduce a fresh one.

The discussions form part of consultation on the issue, and the National Park will make a decision on what to do later in the year.



Photo: all-about-wolves.com

Book Reviews:

Wolves in the Land of Salmon

David Moskowitz, Timber Press

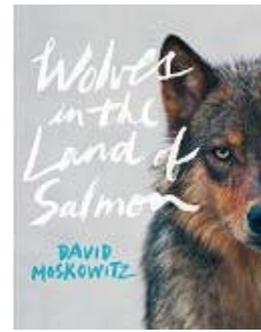
Wolves in the Land of Salmon is a thoughtful and wide-ranging look at wolves in the Pacific Northwest, a region of temperate rainforests and mountain ranges along the coast of Washington state in the USA and British Columbia in Canada, extending into the state of Oregon to the south, and as far inland the base of the Rocky Mountains, including parts of Montana and Idaho; a surprisingly diverse range of landscapes and habitat.

David Moskowitz is an expert wildlife tracker and photographer, who understands wolves and their place in the landscape, and the science and politics of wolf recovery. Mixing science with captivating accounts of tracking animals in the wilderness of this unique region, the book offers refreshing and balanced perspectives on the return of wolves, their impact on prey species and habitat, and attitudes to

wolf conservation and management.

An essay on wolves and elk and the different interpretations of 'health' of natural systems in Idaho in chapter seven is one of the most articulate and thought-provoking pieces of writing on attitudes to predators and the motivations for conservation you will find, and is worth the price of the book alone.

Add to this evocative photography that takes you right into the wilderness with the author, and this is a highly recommended and very readable book that will hopefully make a positive contribution to wolf recovery in the Pacific Northwest of America, and highlight the issues facing their Canadian neighbours.



Bear Witness

Mandy Haggith, Saraband

Following her last book, *The Last Bear*, set 1,000 years in the past, just as the bear is about to become extinct in Scotland, Mandy Haggith's new novel jumps forward into the near future, when Scots have voted for independence from the UK, and the story uses the reintroduction of the bear as a symbol of a nation waking from its long winter sleep to a new freedom.

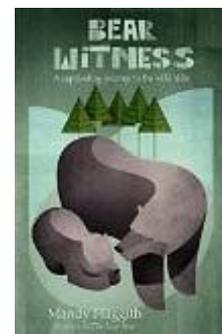
A young scientist witnesses an incident in which a Norwegian farmer shoots a bear cub in the centre of Trondheim, which changes her life as she becomes involved first with government attempts to rescue the population of bears in Norway, and then with a proposal to reintroduce bears to her native Scotland.

Dealing with the loss of her mother, and an awakening of an emotional and passionate side of

herself previously suppressed by dedication to science and loyalty to a feminist sorority from university, Callis embarks on a journey to the wilder parts

of Europe, meeting people who have dedicated their lives to bears in different ways, discovering romance and putting her scientific career on the line as she follows her heart to try and bring the bear back to Scotland.

Whilst some of the ideas and events in this book seem a little far-fetched, don't let this put you off; indulge your imagination and allow yourself to be carried along by a fast moving, and captivating story with a message for everyone who with an interest in bringing back native species.





NEW GROUP PROPOSES REINTRODUCTION OF LYNX TO SCOTLAND

A new conservation organisation is proposing a trial reintroduction of lynx to Scotland. The Lynx Trust UK plans to apply for a licence to release two pairs of lynx in a remote forested area on the west coast of Scotland. The group, headed by conservation biologist Dr Paul O'Donoghue, is applying for charity status and seeking funding for the project, which has been widely reported in national newspapers.

Scottish Natural Heritage has said that it will consider any application on the basis of international guidelines on species reintroductions, however it is likely that approval would take some time as it would need to be discussed by the National Species Reintroduction Forum, and extensive consultation carried out with various stakeholders, including farmers and landowners.

Further information about the Lynx Trust UK can be found on their website www.lynxuk.org.

WOLVES AND HUMANS IS DOG MAGAZINE'S CHARITY OF THE MONTH

Online dog video magazine Naturally Happy Dogs has made Wolves and Humans its charity of the Month for August and September. For every person who signs up to an annual subscription to the magazine during these two months, Wolves and Humans will receive a £1 donation.

The monthly magazine covers training and behaviour, health and wellbeing, and general interest stories about dogs. For more information visit www.naturallyhappydogs.com.

MULTI-BREEDING PHENOMENON OBSERVED IN NALIBOKI FOREST WOLVES

With the help of British volunteer Keith Millar, Professor Vadim Sidorovich has identified possible multiple breeding in wolf packs in the Naliboki Forest, north-western Belarus. During fieldwork carried out in May this year, five dens with pups were located in a 400 square kilometre area used by three wolf packs, and two litters were found in another wolf pack territory. Some litters comprised mixed age pups between 2 and 4 weeks old, meaning they must have different mothers, other dens with single age pups were located between 3 and 8 kilometres apart. A wolf pup was also found in a red fox earth, along with starving fox cubs.

Professor Sidorovich studies wolves in a 2,750 square kilometre area populated by between 7 to 13 wolf packs with an estimated total of 80 wolves. He is looking for volunteers to help locate dens for a two week period in May 2014. For more details contact Wolves and Humans at the addresses below.



WOLVES AND HUMANS
F O U N D A T I O N

Wolves and Humans is the newsletter of the Wolves and Humans Foundation. *However, the views expressed in articles do not necessarily reflect those of the Foundation.* Any queries, letters or articles for publication should be sent to:

**Wolves and Humans, 2 Blackrod Cottages,
Compton Durville, South Petherton,
Somerset, TA13 5EX,
United Kingdom.**

t: +44 (0)1460 242593

e: info@wolvesandhumans.org

w: www.wolvesandhumans.org

Registered charity no: 1111289

Printed on 100% recycled paper

