

Wolves of the World

WOLVES IN CHINA

Environmentalism at the Farthest Frontiers

by Neil Hutt

Why do you have a place like Yellowstone? Why do you have a place like Jade Dragon Snow Mountain? Why have a national park? The Chinese may come up with different answers, but those are the questions.

— Edward M. Norton,
Director, Yunnan Great Rivers Project

Major attitudinal changes toward the environment have taken place in the past 50 years, particularly in the industrialized West. A large segment of the public has confronted the reality that the world's resources are finite. Nature, once considered an adversary needing strong discipline, is viewed in a different light, and the exploitation of wilderness has been modified by public support for preserving wild lands. After centuries of persecution fueled by virulent hatred, wolves are now afforded varying degrees of protection, and the great predators are rebounding in some areas of their former range.

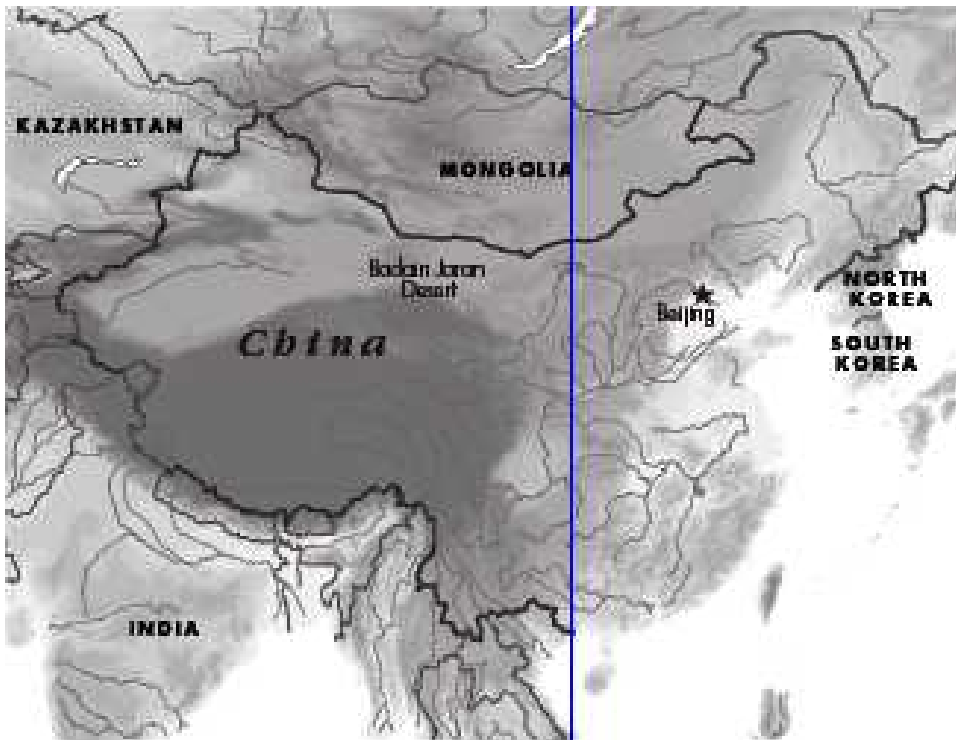
The big question is whether this environmental ethic can be extended

to developing countries. The exploding world population creates enormous pressures on natural resources, food sources and habitat. Unless nations rushing toward modernization can replace consumption with sustainable development, progress in solving ecological problems in the West will make little difference.

That is the bad news. The good news is that a balance between economic growth and preservation is now being sought in some countries that have long neglected the conservation of natural resources. China is one such nation. The Yunnan Great Rivers Project, for instance, is endeavoring to create national parks and protected wilderness areas in a remote southwestern province. And in the Badain Jaran, China's second largest desert, wolves are back, along with other animals that had all but vanished mainly because of unregulated hunting.

While herdsmen in this western region of the Mongolia Autonomous Region report recent significant losses of sheep, lambs and camels to wolf predation, they can no longer legally kill wolves that menace their livestock. The Chinese government has enacted laws to ban hunting; thus, the number of wolves is increasing. Also, the herdsmen are encouraged to improve grazing methods and to increase their vigilance over herds.

The return of the wolf to the Badain Jaran is accompanied by the reemergence of a variety of plants and animals, including smaller predators and rodents. China's Academy of



Agricultural Sciences reports that shrubs and grasses such as licorice and ephedras, plants that encourage rainfall, are reappearing. This control of “desertification” could benefit cities like Beijing, which are often enveloped by sandstorms originating in Inner Mongolia.

This is encouraging news. Perhaps the environmental pessimists are wrong in their predictions that preserving biodiversity and wild lands is impossible because too many people are exploiting too many resources. Recovery of the Badain Jaran demonstrates that at least some of what was lost or nearly ruined can be restored. Laws enacted to halt environmental degradation are the first step. The next challenge is to build public support.

The author acknowledges the following sources of information:



John Pomfret, “An American Gamble on a Chinese Shangri-La,” *Washington Post*, Sunday, August 6, 2000.



Xinhua News Agency, “Wolves Prowl China’s Second Largest Desert,” October 16, 2002; http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2002-10/16/content_598843.htm.

WOLVES IN THE UNITED STATES

Mexican Wolves: Rough Road to Recovery

by Neil Hutt

The wolves are doing very well.

— Brian Kelly, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator

They’re nothing more than a pain and a drain on taxpayers.

— Erik Ness, spokesman for the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau

For the third consecutive year, Mexican wolves have reproduced in the wild in New Mexico and Arizona. This is good news for conservationists and bad news for some ranchers. “It’s very encouraging,” said Craig Miller of Defenders of Wildlife. “The most valuable asset in any captive reintroduction program is the survival of wild-born pups.” Erik Ness of the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau disagreed. “In our opinion, having more wolves out there is not a success,” he said.

Since the first 11 Mexican wolves were released in March 1998, the recovery program has suffered a series of setbacks. Raised in captivity, the wolves had to learn to survive in the wild. Of the 74 wolves released since the program began, 26 have died. Some have been shot or hit by cars, and others have been recaptured after attacking livestock and domestic animals or because they strayed from the recovery area.

But there is reason for being optimistic that the recovery goal—a self-sustaining population of 100 by 2006—can be attained. Twenty-one radio-collared wolves in eight packs now range the recovery area, but managers believe the numbers are higher. Seven, and possibly all eight, of the packs are believed to have had pups in spring 2002, and the number surviving is not known.

Controversy erupted recently when seven pups in the Pipestem pack were euthanized after wildlife officials determined they were wolf-dog hybrids. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials insist the euthanization of the pups was justifiable and necessary. Wolf fans, however, were

Don Zippert






outraged. The death of the Pipestem pups all but obscured the good news that two captured pups from another pack were released after genetic tests concluded they were bona fide Mexican wolves.

Complaints about Mexican wolves killing livestock show no signs of waning despite \$15,000 in compensation paid for 27 domestic animals killed or injured by wolves. The program continues to draw fire from ranchers and rural people, including the Apaches on the San Carlos Reservation who want five pups and two adults removed from tribal lands. In addition, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission is demanding that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service make substantial changes in the Mexican wolf reintroduction program to address their complaints about such issues as depredations, the capturing of hybrids and the alleged lack of communication by the service to stakeholders in eastern Arizona and western New Mexico.

Nevertheless, Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator Brian Kelly remains determinedly optimistic. "Most of the groups are coming to the table and trying to find ways to work this out. If they're doing that, there's hope."

The author acknowledges the following sources of information:

-  Mexican Wolf News Powered by the California Wolf Center: <http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/0909wolves-ON.html>.
-  Associated Press article, *Arizona Republic*, March 28, 2002; www.azcentral.com.
-  Pauline Arrillaga, "Untamed Recovery," *Arizona Daily Sun*, September 20, 2002; http://www.azdailysun.com/non_sec/nav_includes/story.cfm?storyID=49073.

Neil Hutt is an educator and International Wolf Center board member who lives in Purcellville, Virginia.



Wolves Return to Wrangel Island

"The Story Has Begun"

by Neil Hutt

"Now I got them! We got them on the island!" With these jubilant words, Russian biologist and researcher Nikita Ovsyanikov announced his stunning discovery on September 26, 2002. While traveling inland on Wrangel Island, the remote nature preserve off the coast of Siberia, Ovsyanikov found "solid confirmation" of a pack of seven wolves, including three pups.

Wolves have not lived on Wrangel Island since 1983 when the Russian government eliminated a pack of eight animals in order to protect

musk-oxen and reindeer. Ovsyanikov hoped wolves would disperse from Siberia and make their way across the 100 miles of frozen sea to this "arctic Eden." If they did not, reintroduction would be necessary, although Ovsyanikov conceded that such an effort would doubtless be prohibitively expensive.

Says Ovsyanikov, "Now the story has begun—a story of wolves colonizing the island where two species of ungulates lived for decades without a large predator. For the first time in the history of Wrangel Island, wolves will be allowed to settle and develop their own life history in this unique ecosystem."

Visit the International Wolf Center's Web site (www.wolf.org) to read Ovsyanikov's letter describing his discovery.

WOLVES IN EUROPE

Europeans State Their Position on Hunting to Manage Wolves

by Jay Hutchinson

Hunting, if used properly, can be a practical, low-cost tool to help humans coexist with wolves and other large carnivores in Europe. This is the position of a core group of European conservationists who support the Action Plan for the conservation of wolves, brown bears, wolverines and two species of lynx still found in parts of Europe (see *International Wolf*, Winter 2002).

The conservationists point out that while areas of Europe offer potential for some of these animals to expand their present ranges, no large wilderness areas remain in Europe. So large carnivores can conflict with livestock raising, compete with hunters for deer and other wild ungulates, and raise people's fears of being attacked.

Conservation, they say, implies saving the species, not every individual, and hunting for trophies, for recreation or simply for control has long been a tradition in parts of Europe. Whether to use hunting or nonlethal means to control conflicts should be decided locally, depending on public opinion and ecological factors.

If nonlethal means cannot reduce conflicts, the conservationists point out that hunting may have the following benefits:

1. Allows long-standing traditions to continue;
2. Helps hunters regard wolves as game or sources of income, not as competitors, thus increasing respect for wolves;
3. Increases a sense of empowerment among locals;
4. Keeps wolf populations and predation at tolerable levels;
5. Makes wolves wary of people, thereby reducing conflicts;
6. Generates revenue in rural areas;
7. Increases long-term acceptance by slowing the recovery rate of wolves; and
8. Reduces poaching because locals have a stake in management.



The European conservationists conclude by saying that if social and ecological factors dictate that hunting should be used in some areas, it must be done under the following conditions:

1. Hunting is part of a comprehensive plan written in consultation with locals and wildlife interest groups and acceptable to a majority.
2. The wolf population is stable and can sustain hunting.
3. The social organization of wolves and how removal of individuals will affect it is taken into account.
4. Monitoring prevents the population from dropping below a set minimum.
5. Age, sex, condition, weight, reproductive organs, genetic samples and so on are monitored and reported annually.
6. Hunters are trained, and killing is done humanely and does not violate international, national or regional laws.
7. Closed seasons and quotas are imposed, taking into account hunter kills, predator control and road kills. Wounded and unrecovered animals are considered killed.

(This position statement was prepared by the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe core group and does not necessarily reflect the views of all LCIE member organizations or individuals.)

Jay Hutchinson is a writer and editor, retired from the U.S. Forest Service's North Central Research Station, in St. Paul, Minnesota. Between travels, he enjoys writing about various natural history subjects, including wolves.