

Wayward Wolves

(*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, “wayward: *unpredictable, irregular; following one’s own capricious or wanton inclinations*”)

By

Dexter K. Oliver

Hold onto your hat. One of the most polarizing biological experiments in the United States, the introduction or reintroduction of wolves onto the landscape, has suddenly had the crystal clear, bright spotlight of truth shown upon it. Or, as the syndicated radio commentator, Paul Harvey, used to say, here’s “*the rest of the story*”, that you probably never heard before.

Ted B. Lyon, Will N. Graves, and a host of collaborators had the inclination, resources, and perseverance to compile into one tome the history, politics, science, economics, and legal wrangling involved in these controversial and emotionally charged federal programs. Their new book, *The Real Wolf*, separates fact from fiction, shows the flaws behind the U.S. Congress-designated Endangered Species Act (ESA), reveals the falsehoods the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) based their actions on, and offers comprehensive, rational recommendations to help rectify the immense amount of damage that has been perpetrated.

This was a daunting undertaking, one that has never been done before. It meant bringing together field researchers, the anecdotal stories from people on the ground who are directly affected by the wolves, scientists and taxonomists whose laboratories use DNA analysis to classify species and subspecies of animals, economists to crunch the pie-in-the-sky numbers bandied about by the feds, and lawyers to decipher the truly incredible courtroom arguments put forth by attorneys on the federal payroll. It also underscores the remarkably detrimental biological results of litigious environmental groups whose actions enrich their executives while helping to annihilate the very wildlife they seek donations to preserve.

Ted B. Lyon is a former Texas State Senator, State Representative, and a distinguished trial lawyer with an affinity for the outdoors and wildlife. His Montana retreat is in the heart of Rocky Mountain wolf country and wolf conflicts. Will N. Graves is an American linguist who initially became interested in diseases carried and spread by both wild and domestic canines

while working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture combating the highly infectious and deadly foot-and-mouth disease in Mexico. During the Korean War he was taught the Russian language and began a decades' long study of wolves in Russia, the many diseases they carried and transmitted, and the truth about wolves killing and eating human beings. He wrote a definitive book about what he learned, *Wolves in Russia: Anxiety Through the Ages*.

The Real Wolf is broken into twenty-one chapters, each building upon the previous one much the way a counselor would construct a case in a courtroom. This, of course, is by design and the opening statement by the lead author is to the "ladies and gentlemen of the court of public opinion". Since we have already heard (for almost thirty years!) the strident cries of environmental groups waving begging cups for wolves and the condescendingly paternal voice of federal employees it is indeed refreshing to have an even-handed, cool-headed presentation of just facts. These are backed up by 460 references, footnotes, and links to sources for anyone to double check or expand an investigation into the details.

Interestingly enough, one of the wealthy environmental groups is quoted as saying, "They never let facts get in the way of the truth." I have spent decades working for and with state and federal wildlife agencies and this is not an uncommon attitude among them either; as is also pointed out in this book. Lyon, Graves, and Company do the public a huge favor by going behind the smokescreens and funhouse mirrors to ferret out the realities and allow the reader to make his or her own judgments about them.

The very arguments about the "purity" of "their" wolves that both environmental groups and the FWS have been basing their steamrolling reintroductions on are melting away like old adobe blocks in a downpour. In the Rocky Mountains there was ample evidence that some indigenous wolves still existed, which would make it illegal to import larger (and even hungrier) wolves from Canada. This didn't stop the FWS which has a well-worn history of disdaining its own laws to follow the agenda of the day.

The newly introduced wolves either killed or bred out the existing ones and went on an unprecedented killing spree, wiping out vast herds of elk and moose that had taken decades to nourish. Yellowstone National Park's prey base is now so limited that wolf numbers are already crashing and burning. Or seeking new sources of protein outside the park.

In the Southwest, the use of DNA testing to prove that the seventy-five or so Mexican wolves the FWS currently has out on the ground are truly “pure” and therefore deserving of stringent ESA protections has been questioned since before the first releases sixteen years ago. That whole quagmire that the feds had hoped would go away is brought to the forefront in *The Real Wolf*. It is my prediction that facts from within the book will be referenced in cases involving wolf issues in courts of law in the near future.

My father, when he was director of the American Museum of Natural History, NYC, was on the editorial board that got L. David Mech’s seminal book, *The Wolf*, published forty-four years ago. At the time, it was considered the bible of wolf information and it still has a lot to offer about pack structure, wolf interactions, and the like. But one thing that even David Mech now concedes is that he was wrong stating that only rabid wolves would attack humans.

Thanks in part to Will Graves in-depth research about wolves in Russia, as well as recent human fatalities caused by wolves in North America, the Disney-based concept of this benign large carnivore being no threat is finally being overturned. As one of my Ph.D. biologist friends once stated, the only reason bears, mountain lions, and wolves don’t kill and eat more people is probably because all the chemicals in our systems taste so bad. But basic survival instinct will make any hungry predator look twice at such easy prey as unarmed humans pose.

Such instincts about self preservation are hard-wired into all of us, including wolves, as is the biological drive to reproduce. Because there are a lot more dogs and coyotes in the United States than there are pure-bred wolves it is easy to see why so much mongrelization is taking place as wolf populations spread out. Various wolf species or subspecies interbreeding with coyotes and domestic dogs are going to turn the ESA upside down and question - once again - the legal aspects of any of these reintroduction projects. And habituated wolves and hybrid specimens are much more apt to attack people than pure, wilderness strains.

The Real Wolf has a wealth of knowledge between its covers, something for everyone to contemplate, especially people living in proposed or current wolf reintroduction areas of the country. In a democracy such as ours, the access to independently gathered information is as important as our right to vote. Without it, the general populace is at the mercy of government generated propaganda that will often be as corrupt as it can get away with. This book will help maintain our rights as a free society.

Dexter K. Oliver is a freelance writer and wildlife consultant living in Duncan, Arizona. He has worked for a dozen wildlife organizations including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the San Carlos Apache Recreation and Wildlife Division, and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. He has hands-on experience with Mexican gray wolves and has written extensively about that flawed reintroduction program for the past ten years.