

## Setting the Record Straight on Wolves

BOOK REVIEW by Carol W. LaGrasse

### *The Real Wolf:*

*The Science, Politics, and Economics of Co-Existing with Wolves in Modern Times*

By **Ted B. Lyon and Will N. Graves**

(Far Country Press, Helena, Mt., 368 pp., oversize, color photos, maps, Softcover \$21.00, Hardcover \$30.00)

This is the book that we have been waiting for: a definitive, thorough source of information about the historical experience resulting from the introduction of the Canadian wolf into Yellowstone Park, as well as an encyclopedic array of information about the wolf in the United States and the world. *The Real Wolf: The Science, Politics, and Economics of Co-Existing with Wolves in Modern Times*, by Ted B. Lyon and Will N. Graves, deserves widespread readership for methodically and scientifically setting to rest the sentimental modern mythology about the wolf so prevalent here in the East, where the lack of accurate information has allowed radical environmentalists to recruit well-meaning people to their pro-wolf movement.

*The Real Wolf* uses twenty-one chapters by expert sources to cover a range of essential topics, such as “The Myth of the Harmless Wolf” by Mr. Lyon, “Russian Wolves and American Wolves: No Difference” by Mr. Graves,” and “The Caribou Conservation Conundrum” by Arthur Bergerud, Ph.D., a population ecologist who had studied caribou populations in North America since 1955.

The chapter by Valerius Geist, “Seven Steps of Wolf Habituation” drew me immediately into the deep content of the book. The esteemed Dr. Geist was a professor of environmental science and biology at the University of Calgary, and had fifteen books published, as well as numerous scholarly papers and much more, all on an array of wildlife topics and speeches. He began, “Nothing convinces like personal experience!”

He wrote, “In my four decades of field research on ungulates in North America—mountain sheep, goats, elk, deer, moose, etc.—I observed wolves, and my experience with continental wolves matches that of my colleagues; namely, wolves are intelligent and wary and keep their distance from people. Consequently, during my academic career and for years into my retirement, I thought of wolves as harmless.” He considered the contrary reports from Russia, Europe, and Scandinavia as irrelevant to North American wolves. “I was wrong!” he wrote.

Dr. Geist tells the details of his increasing observations of wolves. In northern British Columbia, they were peacefully shy. But he began to appreciate their strategies and tenacity as hunters. He crossed a wolf track every fifty paces. “They were scouring for moose.”

He also began to experience a wolf following him, then sit and listen at his cabin. Another time three wolves began to surround him on a frozen lake, one racing toward him and retreating. He tells about how his knowledge of wolves grew, how they returned to Vancouver Island, where wolves had been extinct, when he retired. Wolves had also returned and swept the island. The annual kill by hunters of black-tailed deer dropped from 25,000 to less than 3,000 today. Reports of wolves threatening people occurred. Deer hid out in towns, suburbia and about farms. The elk population was at a low level. He describes the wolf attacks in detail beginning at the time of his retirement in 1999,

wolves attacking dogs, barking at people, even fraternizing with sheep dogs brought to protect from wolves, and worse incidents.

He relates these experiences and others, including the killing of a 22-year old geological engineering student at the University of Waterloo when he was at Points North Landing in northern Saskatchewan on November 8, 2005 and participated in the investigation. This was the first human fatality in modern times in North America to receive a thorough investigation.

**The Seven Steps.** After Dr. Geist's studies of this and other wolf fatalities in Russia, Scandinavia, Europe, and the Middle East, he found that "a seven-stage model of habituation has emerged that progressively leads wolves from shy, wild animals to those that begin targeting people as prey."

The first stage of habituation is when prey becomes scarce or completely absent. Deer enter the suburbs and farms, damage gardens, and sleep close to houses and barns. "The virtual absence of wildlife in the landscape was striking." Sometimes wolves will increasingly visit garbage dumps at night.

Skipping ahead, the sixth stage of habituation is when wolves turn their attention to people, observing them closely and examining them carefully. They may make hesitant almost playful attacks. They defend kills by moving toward people.

In the seventh stage, wolves attack people. Initial attacks are clumsy and people often escape because of this clumsiness. A mature, courageous man may beat or strangle an attacking wolf, but there is no defense against a wolf pack.

Dr. Geist explains why the fallacious argument that there is little danger from wolves because they rarely attacked humans in North America is false. He explains that in the past decades, since the wolves were killed off, "we have experienced in North America a unique situation: we had a recovery of wildlife... This restoration of North America's wildlife and thus this continent's biodiversity, is probably the greatest environmental success story of the twentieth century."

Each of the essays in *The Real Wolf* bolsters the mission of the authors to fully inform the reader on the truth about wolf behavior. For example, Don Peay, a chemical engineer who started a consulting firm Petroleum Environmental Management Inc., is the founder of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep (FNAWS). In the chapter "Mathematical Error or Deliberate Misrepresentation?" he refutes the oft-repeated claim by proponents of wolf introduction that wolves kill only the sick and weak, thereby helping the health of the herd. Recalling that his professors told him that mathematics is a universal language, he used engineering analysis to predict the wolf's destructive effect on the elk herd. The analysis was all true. The elk herd in the greater Yellowstone is now reduced by 80 percent, and bison are presently threatened.

I think that most people who hear about *The Real Wolf* would want to know why, if the romanticized nature of the wolf that they learned about in the media and so many books is wrong, how is it possible that the truth, the old way that people viewed wolves as fearful and wantonly dangerous, has been so convincingly put in doubt.

The chapter entitled “Selling the Wolf,” by the book’s co-author Ted Lyon, could stand alone for its significance as a concentrated source of documentation about how the image of the mythic, romantic wolf was promoted. Mr. Lyon describes how a change in attitude away from the traditional was cultivated, how through a broad array of publicity and promotion to the new wolf image, the near universal fear of the wolf widely diminished, while the pro-wolf movement was skillfully built. He packs in a brief history of how the pro-wolf movement advanced during the 1990s, with an analysis of the false claims in the fund raising campaigns of groups like Defenders of Wildlife. Many of the recent books and films from which Mr. Lyons quotes are quite familiar, illustrating their popularity. He also discusses the attitudes of historic figures such as Aldo Leopold.

His research for this one chapter is wide ranging. For instance, he quotes the inaccurate statements made by USFWS wolf biologist Ed Bangs that “wolves never attack people” during an interview of PBS “Wild Wolves,” also claiming that the annual wolf kill was five cattle and five sheep year in the Northern Rockies, whereas in Wyoming alone in 2010 they killed 65 livestock (cattle and sheep) plus three horses and a dog. This is the chapter to turn to for a thorough rundown of the influential and significant books that have been published. Ted Lyons believes that people do want to hear the truth about wolves and he promises the reader that more lies ahead.

Will Graves, who wrote the chapter “Russian Wolves and American Wolves: No Difference,” trained as a Russian linguist for Air Force. When he began working in Russia during the Korean War, he started reading Russian wildlife books and magazines. He began to notice that wolves were often discussed and so he began the copious note taking of everything he could learn on Russian wolves. His interviews and research in Russia included compiling the incidents of wolf attacks and placing these in the historical context of state policies, all of which was published in detail in his book *Wolves in Russia*. The grisly history reflected in his narrative in *The Real Wolf* reads depicts the swings of the wolf population during wars and regimes.

He points out that in Russia the long-term experience with wolves foreshadows what we can expect in North America as rapidly growing wolf populations come into contact for the first time with modern settlement patterns and the big game populations that have been carefully built up from Teddy Roosevelt’s time are decimated. “[T]he picture is not rosy.”

Heather Smith-Thomas, a cattle and horse rancher who has written twenty books on horse care and cattle raising, makes an essential contribution to the knowledge of the losses experienced by livestock producers with her compelling chapter, “Wolves, A Serious Threat to Livestock Producers.” It is sad to be reminded again how the views of the uninformed public in the East and in western cities overshadowed the accurate understanding of the rural communities in the West, and tragic to read years later about how the reasoned arguments by rural people turned out to be truthful.

This is the hardest chapter of all to read, not only because Ms. Smith-Thomas’s statistics make the horrible stories all too real, but because she depicts the destruction of a way of life and generations of ranching, the total abrogation of private property rights, and the deliberate introduction of wanton cruelty to the carefully, even lovingly, tended livestock. She details of personal losses, one year after another, the patient efforts the ranchers made to work with the Fish and Wildlife Service and to exist with the wolves. She recounts page after page of details of heartrending losses to wolves. The wolf hunts as now legalized will not be nearly enough to bring the wolf population down to a size where the ranches can thrive again, Ms. Smith-Thomas explains.

One of her final quotes is from Jay Smith, a rancher near Carmen, Idaho: “This maneuver by our federal government is stealing from me, my children, and our future. It may destroy our livelihood, and our entire lifestyle is also in jeopardy.”

In the northern reaches of New York State which include the area where I live, the recent surge in goat production and organic beef farming is incompatible with the continued efforts of the state’s pro-wolf forces to reestablish the wolf. Will Grave’s knowledge conveyed in the chapter “The Wolf as a Disease Carrier,” the second chapter he has written for *The Real Wolf*, has specific relevance in this region and much of the Northeast.

He opens the chapter with the description of the war against wolves in the 1960s and 1970s in northern Lapland. Soldiers killed every wolf with submachine guns. In Finland, the war against wolves was not against them as predators, but against a tapeworm carried by wolves, *Echinococcus granulosus*, and the horrible illness it created. The tapeworm causes the disease known as Hydatid Disease that wolves transfer to reindeer and people. Will Graves writes, “The only way the *E. granulosus* parasite will be eliminated is elimination of the wolf.” Ironically, Mr. Graves shows that *E. granulosus* was not present among the native wolves in the Northern Rockies before the introduction of the Canadian wolf.

This chapter of *The Real Wolf* has thoroughly documented information on wolves as disease carriers and the incidence in the United States and worldwide of serious wolf-borne diseases. For this one chapter alone, *The Real Wolf* should be on the desk of every member of Congress and the legislatures of the states such as New York and the northern New England States, where safety measures to protect the agricultural industry and rural people are urgently needed before *E. granulosus* infects dogs, which carry the disease to people.

A review can only hint at the depth and importance of this masterpiece setting the record straight about wolves. It awaits world-wide readers who long to know the truth about *The Real Wolf*.

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