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About the black side of “nature” veneration

**Gray wolves and the black side of the “Nature knows best” dogma, or how hands-on management is vital to high biodiversity, productivity and a humane treatment of wildlife.**

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**Abstract.** We are currently drowning in valid information about gray wolves, judging by the many books that have appeared in the past decade, from the solid work on captive canids, and the global historical information. The manner in which wolves in expanding, protected populations behave can be predicted with precision. And that includes attacks on humans. As such follow from willful protection of wolves, a legal opinion is required pinpointing culpability. It can also be predicted that wolves will eventually be removed from settled landscapes, as has been recorded globally in historic time. Wolves do not belong into settled landscapes because of the severe damage they cause and because they are destroyed genetically as a natural species via hybridization with wild and domestic canids. The mysterious near-absence of attacks on humans in North America by wolves, turns out to be due to parity of numbers of trappers and wolves, thereby placing wolves into continual contact with hostile, armed humans. That would effectively teach wolves to avoid humans. In north America hydatid disease co-expands with wolves. Since wolves cause extreme panic in deer, elk and moose, wolves would cause Chronic Wasting Disease to spread. Wolf reintroduction arose due to a widespread belief in nature protection. This sentiment however has caused national parks to lose biodiversity and gain massive invasive species. Over 6,500 in US national parks alone. Conservation pioneers are showing that a massive restoration of vanished native flora is possible with hands-on management using tools and fire. The natural “regulation” paradigm of the nature protectors is an intellectual failure, as it has to be, if one understands that ecosystems, unlike individuals, are subject to positive, not negative feed back. No “balance” is possible in ecosystems in principle. We can vastly improve on Nature and restore rich biodiversity with proven hands-on management. Not everything “Natural” is good, beautiful or tolerable. And we can even spare large prey the agony and protracted brutality of killings by wolves. We treat hunted game much more humanly than “nature” does. A landscape kept without mongrel canids could be far richer in native species and poorer in invasives via

hands-on management than a “Nature knows best” dogma could ever achieve.

**Zusammenfassung.** Heute ertrinken wir fast in einer Flut von genauen Kenntnissen über Wölfe, erkennbar in den vielen modernen Büchern und Schriften, oder der exakten Studien an sozialisierten Kaniden oder den geschichtlichen Abhandlungen. Wie können voraussagen wie Wölfe sich in ausbreitenden, geschützten Beständen verhalten, inclusive Angriffe auf Menschen. Und wer trägt die gesetzliche Verantwortung in diesen Fällen? Nach der Geschichte zu urteilen, werden eines Tages doch alle Wölfe aus besiedelter Landschaft entfernt, wie es global geschah in geschichtlicher Zeit. Wölfe gehören nicht in besiedelte Gebiete, weil sie dort unglaublichen Schaden stiften und weiterhin durch Hybridisierung mit Hunden und anderen Kaniden genetisch als natürliche Art aussterben. Die mysteriöse Abwesenheit von Wolfsangriffen auf Menschen in Nord-Amerika kommt dadurch zustande, dass die Zahl der Trapper und Wölfe fast gleich liegen, so dass Wölfe innerhalb ihres riesigen Areales, dort immer und immer wieder mit bewaffneten, feindlichen Menschen zusammentreffen. Das lehrt Wölfe, sich von Menschen fernzuhalten. In Nord-Amerika breitet sich die Echinococcose mit dem Wolf aus. Da Wölfe panisches Fluchtverhalten und Abwandern von Wild verursachen, würden sie nur die Chronische Auszehrungskrankheit verbreiten. Das Schonen und Ausbreiten der Wölfe verdanken wir dem weitverbreiteten Glauben an Naturschutz. Solcher Schutz, allerdings, führt in National-Parks zu einem Verlust an Biodiversität, sowie der Ausbreitung invasiver Arten. Im Gegenzug zeigte man, wie auf kleinster Fläche durch intelligente Führung mit „menschlicher Hand, mit Werkzeug und Feuer“ die Biodiversität enorm gesteigert werden kann. Die „Selbstregulierungs-These“ scheitert an der positiven Rückkopplung im Ökosystem, denn nur negative Rückkopplung kann eine Balance schaffen, und die gibt es in Ökosystem nicht. Mit aktiver Landschaftspflege und -Hege können wir eine weit größere Biodiversität und Reproduktion erzielen. Nicht alles Natürliche ist schön, brauchbar oder begehrenswert. Im Gegenteil! Wir können sogar unserem Wild die Brutalität des Gerissen-Werdens sparen – selbst wenn solches „natürlich“ ist. Wir behandeln Wild weit humaner, als die “Natur” das tut. Und eine Landschaft ohne verwilderte Caniden ist weit reicher in einheimischen Arten als es mit dogmatischem „Naturschutz” erreicht werden kann.

In the past decade a number of books and other publications have critically reviewed our knowledge, historical and current, about the ecology and behavior of gray wolves, such as Carbyn (2003, 2017), Graves (2007) Morriceau (2007), Stubbe (2008), Lyon and Graves (2014/2018), Remington (2014), Granlund (2015), Granlund and Graves (2019), Stahl (2016), Möller (2017), Geist (201, 2017, 2018), Gunson (2018), Wild (2018), as well as the website *Wolf Education International* (<http://wolfeducationinternational.com/>). Significant understanding had been developed with captive, socialized wolves, and with other captive canids and dogs (Frank 1987, Copinger and Copinger 2001, 2016, Bodio 2016). To this one must add the translation of Leonid Pavlovich Sabaneyev's (1867) book on wolves in Russia translated by and available from Kaj Granlund. There are available, of course, many more books on wolves, not only such critical of current conventional wisdom about wolves. These

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publications, together with many earlier ones, allow us in their totality to judge the happenings as wolves multiply and spread unencumbered. As to the weight of evidence I noted, for instance, the following in Geist (2009). *„How could one uphold the view that wolves are harmless to people, despite centuries of recorded experience to the contrary in Russia (Pavlov 1982, Graves 2007), Finland (Lappalainen 2005, Teperi, 1977, Capstick 1981), France (Moriceau, 2007), Italy (Oriani and Comincini 2002), Sweden (Connolly, 2000), Germany (Flemming, von 1749), India (Jahal 2003, Jahala and Sharma 1997, Rajpurohit 1999), Afghanistan (Stewart 2004), Korea (Neff 2007), Japan (Walker 2005), central Asia (Blua 2005) , Turkey, Iran (Baltazard and Ghodissi 1954) or Greenland (Freuchen 1935)? Peter Freuchen, an explorer of Greenland, in Arctic Adventure reports that he lost a companion to wolves (p. 23, pp. 329, 332); he had harrowing experiences with Greenland wolves trying to break into his cabin (pp. 16-19); he shot a wolf stalking his children (pp. 347-348) and his outpost could not be provisioned by dog sled as every attempt was halted by wolf attacks. He reported an observation made by a long time resident and hunter in Greenland: where there are wolves, there are no people and vice versa! And while details in Hazaribagh, Northern India, may be different the causes of wolf predation on humans are much the same: scarcity of prey or opportunity to kill livestock, de facto protection of wolves, followed by systematic targeting of peoples as prey, mainly children” (Rajpurohit 1999).“*

Europeans have not been silent on the matter of wolves as can be seen, for instance, in the successive volumes of the “Beiträge zur Jagd & Wildforschung”, however, some topics, such as wolves preying on humans, have receive scant attention, as has the transmission of diseases by wolves, or the devastating effects on hunting economics and wildlife prevalence as landscapes are emptied of wildlife by wolves. By contrast, nothing could be more explicit than the arguments by livestock producers such as Brandt (2019) and Kratzer (2019) or of greater legal clarity than the writings by Dr. Rudi Gürtler (i.e. Gürtler (2017), or precise methodologies separating wolves from hybrids as developed by Wernher Gerhards. There is the beginning of a vigorous debate about wolves in Europe with, fortunately, more qualified actors becoming vocal. And there are great legislative difficulties dealing rationally with wolves. Meanwhile, we are drowning in valid information about wolves! However, one also cannot escape the recognition of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel :”*We learn from history that we do not learn from history*”.

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In the meantime, “wolves” – so called – in Europe, and wolves in north America, follow expectations precisely. In deep irony, Yellowstone National Park is being emptied of prey as the remnants of such seek sanctuary outside the park on private land and in hamlets and towns, while wolves are declining in numbers, as only 7% of the pups survive, with the primary mortality is wolves killing wolves. Wolves, inflicted with parvo virus, distemper and mange are also leaving Yellowstone park (Anon 2019), where, of course, they are subject to further reduction by hunting. Yellowstone National Park is thus moving into a “predator pit” situation. Ironically, the wolves are not effective reducing buffalo in the park, unlike wolves in Wood Buffalo National Park (Carbyn 2017) so that the severe landscape damage inflicted by buffalo continues on. Hardly a deterrent for tellers of the fairy tale of wolves as “saviors” of Yellowstone's ecology (Marris 2014).

There is no doubt that wolves in the Europe follow a slow escalation model (Möller 2017), getting closer and closer to attacking humans. Attacks are inevitable as wolves explore and become familiar with humans. The science and scholarship is quite clear here. It is timely to ask who will carry legally the blame, and what will be the consequences, when humans become victims of wolves. It can also be predicted on the basis of history, that wolves will be removed once again from settled landscapes in Europe due to the intolerable damage they inflict.

Wolves do not belong into settled landscapes. Not only do they do great damage to wildlife, or to agriculture, but they also pose a real threat to public health, and they kill humans under now well-known circumstances. Moreover, after all the pain, suffering and deprivations that wolves inflict on people in settled landscapes, after the enormous public expenditures to maintain wolves, all the effort and costs are for naught, because in settled landscapes wolves degrade via hybridization with dogs and other canids, such as coyotes in north America, into worthless hybrids, and, eventually into mere feral dogs. Settled landscapes remorselessly destroy the real, natural species wolf. Wolves cannot be conserved as a Darwinian species in settled landscapes. What is being done with wolves in the US and in Europe has nothing to do with nature conservation. However, what is being done with legislation is an expensive and certain way to destroy the wolf as an evolved, natural species.

Some question are still in need of answers, such as why North American wolves have so

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rarely killed people. And the answer is surprisingly simple. In Canada there are about 60,000 trappers and 60,000 wolves. In earlier decades, when not only trappers, but also hunters, farmers, ranchers, natives, game wardens as well as predator control officers killed wolves, and substantial poisoning operations were in force, wolf numbers were much less. That is, for every living wolf, there were on the same land area, two or more human residents. Since the areas roamed over by one wolf pack are enormous, it means that wolves could not escape contact with armed humans unsympathetic to wolves. The official kill of wolves was, roughly, one wolf per three trap-line owners per year. We do not know, of course, the total kill, including wolves not submitted for bounty payments. However, what these figures indicate is that all wolves were in continuous contact with armed, hostile humans. Wolves are large-brained, patient, dedicated learners with social traditions. In short wolves in Canada's north, but also in Alaska, were continually educated to avoid humans, explaining the virtual absence of wolf attacks on humans in North America. Ironically, some of the very best information about the lives and attitudes of Canadian trappers, and statistics about wolf kills, behavior and abundance, comes from the popular works of two German authors, Max Hinsche (1935) and Reinhold Eben-Ebenau (1953). They explained matters to a German audience which historically has been infatuated with the “wild and free” myths of Canadian wilderness. North Americans are much less interested in the lives of trapper, which historically have been desperately poor men eking out a bare existence from back-breaking work in the absence of social safety nets, and the presence of fur companies taking advantage of them.

Pertaining to diseases carried by wolves: modern medicine has reduced the dangers of dying from rabies if bitten by a rabid wolf, but in the past it was cause for real anxiety, as the bite of a rabid wolf was fatal. As to hydatid disease, all technical matters I mention are to be found in descriptions on the internet – except for context! There had been a presentation given by myself together with Dr. Helen Schwantje, Wildlife Veterinarian for the Province of British Columbia, to the Montana Legislature's Environmental Quality Council about *Echinococcus granulosus* and *E. multilocularis*, on April 27<sup>th</sup> 2010. Everything we said then applies to all western states today. Nobody can claim they were not warned on the basis of very extensive research carried out by the late Professor James Adams of the University of British Columbia. The claim of a benign parasite is flatly contradicted by Delane C. Kritsky; Professor Emeritus, Idaho State University, who was Associate Dean and Professor (35 years) within Department

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of Health and Nutrition. “*We should be asking who (the U.S. government, the Fish and Wildlife service, the wolf advocates) will be paying the health bills and funeral expenses for those who will ultimately become infected as a result of wolf introduction into Idaho, Montana and Wyoming?*”

Wolves are also known carriers of bovine tuberculosis, brucellosis, *Neospora caninum* (causes abortion in cattle) and, of course, rabies. In Yellowstone, by dispersing elk far beyond the park, the park elk met elk infected with brucellosis, and became infected themselves. In Wood Buffalo National Park wolves have not eliminated tuberculosis and brucellosis in bison. Wolves may not even bother taking down old diseased bison bulls, but look to young disease-free bison instead.

Chronic Wasting Disease is a juggernaut descending onto American wildlife and agriculture (Geist et al. 2017). Because of its prevalence, it has been suggested that predation would wipe out this disease. Not so. It would spread the disease. Wolves generate panic among prey, leading to desperate long distance flight, as well as desperate searches for locations free of wolves, primarily due to human presence. I have personally witnessed this wolf-induced panic among deer and among livestock. Secondly, because wolves in dispersing go great distances, they would spread ingested CWD prions via feces and urine over very great distances. And they would disperse it in concentrated form. More ranches would wind up CWD infected, let alone public lands. And who in his right mind would buy a ranch infected with CWD, or even a ranch adjacent to an infected ranch? Or buy CWD infected produce?

### **The downfall of the “natural” and of “protectionism”.**

Then wolf reintroduction programs arose from a widespread movement of nature protection, in which the “natural” is taunted as superior, in which natural processes are held as desirable and in which human activities including humans are universally denigrated. And this is being done, unaware that simple minded protection actually defeats the very aim of that movement.

Right now the US national park service is bemoaning the fact that in national parks the biodiversity is plummeting (native species are going extinct) while at the same time the parks harbor now over 6,500 invasive plant and animal species

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(<https://www.nps.gov/natr/learn/nature/invasivespecies2.htm>). Management in national parks is primarily “protection” - that is, doing nothing! (after all, “nature knows best”, it will restore ecological " balance" and etc. etc.). However, in reality, doing nothing allows the extinction of sensitive native species, while the hoodlums of the plant and animal world, the invasive species, thrive and prosper under total protection. Is this nature conservation? Is the national park service intellectually capable of differentiating between degeneration and evolution?

To make my point another way: In one project in California, Wildergarten, one gentleman, Mark Vande Pol, in fierce opposition to national parks and their ruinous do-nothing policy, bought 14 acres of ground on which there were only 60 species of plants total, currently visible and reproducing. After 28 years of hard, intelligent, insightful work the count today is some 245 native species, while he controls completely another 125 exotics that were also in the seed bank. Uniquely, the project has a special emphasis upon small annuals. In fact, he is actively replacing an exotic seed bank with natives! Have you ever even heard of such a public, foundation, or university project? While biodiversity on huge areas of public lands is plummeting under do-nothing “protectionism”, active, intelligent intervention on a tiny piece of private land generated unbelievable biodiversity and reversed extinctions! This is but one example why private ownership of land is so vital to nature conservation. Here is biodiversity restored by the application of spade, power-saw, rake and fire and by the application of intellect, tenacity and patience. Elsewhere, the restoration of biodiversity and productivity will demand the application of bulldozers, dynamite, guns, nets, traps and poisons.

The natural “regulation” paradigm of the nature protectors is a simple-minded, intellectual failure. Ecosystems, unlike individuals, are subject to positive, not negative feedback. Positive (selfish) feedback cannot lead to any stability in principle! Only negative (selfless) feedback can. Ecosystems, due to positive feedback, are stochastic systems. Trusting “nature” to do it “right”, whatever that may mean, thus leads to impoverished, unnatural landscapes of low productivity and biodiversity. I experienced that in my lifetime, in which the wildlife paradise of the Spatsizi in northwest British Columbia, after becoming a protected park, became a wildlife desert in five decades. A colleague rode then for three weeks on horseback through the land without seeing a single head of big game. In Yellowstone National Park, with the introduction of wolves, moose went extinct. Which was, of course blamed on global warming. In early fall 2006 I rode for a week in and out of the park from

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dawn to dusk through some of the finest moose habitat I have ever seen. And I have seen a lot of moose habitat in Canada between the Montana/Idaho/ Washington and the Alaska boundaries. I never saw a moose or a track or a feeding sign. And that was during the moose rutting season when bulls are maximally active. And there are many more similar examples.

Letting “nature” have its way does not always lead to the productive, the diverse and the beautiful. Quite the contrary. And we have missed the obvious right under our noses: The revolutionary North American System of Wildlife Conservation not only saved species from extinction, but its knowledgeable hands-on policies created a landscape full of life, full of productivity, full of awe and beauty, as well as to high benefits to society, while proving that the public ownership of land and resources did not lead to the “Tragedy of the Commons”, but quite the contrary. It led to the “Triumph of the Commons”. Tragedy resulted from pecuniary interests undermining the public good. The protectionist movement in North America is not only blind to the damage their policy of protectionism is causing on public land, but also blind to the successes of a hands-on system of nature conservation as expressed in the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (Geist 1995, Geist 2006, Geist, Mahoney and Organ 2001).

Must we abandon our policies that generated productivity, richness and beauty, but also a humane treatment of wildlife in settled landscapes? Under “protectionism” the fate of wildlife is to be changed from being killed quickly and humanely by a hunter's bullet, to being torn to pieces and tortured to death, sometimes suffering for hours, as wolves tear and rip their way towards their unfortunate victim's protracted, agonizing death. Which hunter ever left wildlife torn savagely with their guts hanging out? Which hunter condemns his prey to a slow death? What brutal inhumanities are the protectionists and their ilk in the human societies imposing on our unfortunate wildlife?

We have to make it clear that we can vastly improve on Nature. In fact we are doing so every day in our daily lives. We have improved on bird flight, and can transport humans in masses to distant earthly destinations or to the moon and beyond. We can see so much farther in the night sky than the natural eye can achieve, and, with a hands on policy, we can conserve and diversify nature on the smallest pieces of land, where as national parks fail with their “do nothing” policy. And where by happenstance a continued existence of predators and prey is



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achieved in the “do nothing model”, it is on sizes beyond comprehension. Like some 150 wolves and 2,000 bison in Wood Buffalo National Park, which exceeds Switzerland in size! And I am thrilled that we have such an area for comparison. See the wonderful books of Lu Carbyn on bison and wolves in Wood Buffalo National Park. Read and learn!

Not everything “Natural” is good, not everything “Natural” is beautiful, not everything “Natural” is worth fighting for. Quite the contrary! Cancer is natural, so is tuberculosis and Hydatid disease. We are asked to abandon safe landscapes rich in wildlife, biodiversity and productivity with a proven, humane treatment of wildlife, for landscapes not only hostile to humans, but impoverishing and degraded, in which wildlife is subjected to the horrid cruelties and inhumanity of death by predation. Is that a goal worth celebrating let alone striving for? Dr. Lu Carbyn, Canada's great wolf biologist, stated in Carbyn, L. 2017. *Wolves and Bison in Wood Buffalo National Park*. Private publication. “*I do not believe in reincarnation , but should I be wrong, all I can say is “Lord please do not let me come back on this earth as a BISON IN WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK’. Here is my story why.”*

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