

with great emotion I realized what was being... eyes were staring back at me... 100 feet away. And then, I heard... muffled half-bark followed by... deep, smooth, heavy sound rising... the air. None of the other...

Personal Encounter

Wolves Return to Poland's Holy Cross Primeval Forest

by Roman Gula

In February 2006, I received an e-mail from an old high-school friend. He still lives in our hometown in Poland and had come across an article published in the local newspaper that mentioned that wolves lived in a nearby forest, the Holy Cross Primeval Forest. Knowing that I am a biologist whose current research interest is wolves, he mailed me the article. When I read

the article, I became curious about this rumor. Apparently, one of the villagers I had grown up with had noticed wolf tracks and had actually seen wolves.

I was quite excited. I do wolf research in the Bieszczady Mountains (part of Polish Carpathians), but I return every year to my hometown and spend a few weeks of my holidays hiking and biking through the Holy

Cross Forest and its surroundings. I have always thought there would be enough room for wolves in the forest, but I never imagined that they would manage to come back from the east. I am not a spiritually inclined person, but this time I could not help feeling some kind of connection with those wolves who had returned to the place where I grew up.

Although I had not been in touch with my old childhood acquaintance Artur for more than 20 years, I called him immediately. He is now working as a forestry warden and had also become a hunter and keen naturalist. He told me that he had seen tracks



Włodzimierz Flaneta

Roman Gula, a wolf biologist, was excited to learn that wolves might have returned to the Holy Cross Primeval Forest, near his hometown in Poland. The presence of wolves had been recorded in a radius of 70 kilometers (43 miles) around the forest since the mid-1980s but not in the forest itself.

Looking for signs of wolves in the Holy Cross Forest, Gula and his friends Artur and Krzysztof followed a wolf's trail to a kill site. The snow was stained red with blood and scattered with hair, stomach contents and some bone splinters that had belonged to a roe deer, apparently killed and eaten by wolves.



Archives of Bieszczady Wolf Project

that might have belonged to wolves in summer 2005, but he was unsure whether they might simply be dog tracks. Winter 2005-06 was exceptionally harsh in this region; snow appeared in December and lasted until mid-March. So Artur and other forestry people could look for tracks in the snow for three months. Between December and February, Artur regularly came across the tracks of up to three wolves. In January he found a red deer hind that had been killed and partially eaten by wolves. A few days later, two wolves crossed a forest road 15 meters (16 yards) in front of his car. He checked the tracks after the wolves left and saw that there had been three wolves, but one had crossed the road farther from the car, and Artur had missed it. Although Artur's accounts of his sightings and snow tracking sounded reliable, I still wondered about the veracity of his story. I told Artur that I might drop by and spend a couple of days with him so that we might search for tracks together.

A few days later I was driving with Artur and my friend Krzysztof in the Holy Cross Forest, looking for wolf tracks on the snow. We

covered a large area in five hours but did not see any tracks. We found some wolf-size dog tracks in the vicinity of one village but no wolves. Both Artur and Krzysztof were ready to go home, but something told me we would find wolves. Direct talks with Artur assured me that all the information he had passed to me was based on his own observations, and I believed him. Thanks to my experience radio-tracking wolves, I knew that these animals are very mobile, and I was convinced that finding tracks was only a matter of how much distance we could cover. However, my companions did not share this optimism, especially as Artur had just heard some gossip about a wolf being poached in the south of the forest a few days before. Knowing the negative view that the local hunters have about wolves, we thought that all three wolves might already be dead.

One hour before sunset we spotted wolf prints on the side of the road. They were just the tracks of a single individual, but I turned on my GPS, and we followed them. After more than two kilometers (1.25 miles), this wolf's trail brought us to a kill site. The snow was stained red with blood and scattered with hair, stomach contents and some bone splinters that had belonged to a roe deer, apparently killed and eaten by wolves. The wolf whose tracks we had followed had visited the site of a kill that had been made a few days before. We saw many older wolf tracks, so many that we could not tell how many wolves had been involved. We finally made it back to the car before nightfall.

On the following day I had to return to the Bieszczady Mountains. I was now convinced that wolves had returned to the Holy Cross Forest. Important questions remained unanswered, however: How many wolves lived in the forest? Were they breeding or just passing through? A few days after my return to the Bieszczady, Artur called me and told me that he had followed the tracks of a single wolf. He had not found any



Grzegorz Modyński

The Bieszczady Wolf Project followed a pack of wolves for four years with radio telemetry.

prey, but apparently the wolf had been bleeding. The way he described the scene brought to my mind a female in estrous rather than a wounded wolf. This news was promising, but did she have a partner? I kept on thinking of the rumors about the wolf that had been shot and wondered whether it might have been her partner. Unfortunately, a few days later snow rapidly melted in the Holy Cross Forest. The absence of snow temporarily brought an end to our investigations.

For summer 2006 I planned a four-week survey of the Holy Cross Forest. I thought July would be the best time to try to locate wolves by howling. At this time of year, packs still gravitate around rendezvous sites, where the 8-to-12-week-old pups stay and wait for adults to return from the hunt. The day we chose for our first howling experiment was perfect, as a high pressure had brought a calm evening with a clear sky and chilly night. When Krzysztof and I arrived at Artur's home, he suggested a place in the south of the Holy Cross Forest as a good starting point. He mentioned that a forester had told him he had seen wolf scats on the road near that point. As Artur had just been there and had found two fresh scats, he thought that the wolves might be around in the evening. I was not so positive, but I thought it was a good plan to start in the southern part of the forest and then slowly drive back home, north, calling wolves every 2 to 3 kilometers (1.25 to 1.9 miles) on the way.

We arrived at the spot just as the sun set and parked in a small clearing. We noticed many wolf tracks on the sandy road. I howled for the first time at about 10 p.m., and the wolves immediately answered. We heard the entire pack and estimated that it was about 200 meters (650 feet) from us. We counted at least four adults and several pups. One adult was separated from the others, its voice coming from a different direction. My companions were amazed; Artur had



Wolves in Poland number from 500 to 700, and their range covers about 25,000 square kilometers (9,750 sq. mi.). Wolves in the south are part of the Carpathian Mountains population, the largest in Europe. Wolf habitat in northeastern Poland is connected with occupied wolf habitat in Belarus, the Baltic States, and Russia.

Packs of 2 to 10 individuals (●) occupy territories of 100 to 250 square kilometers (39–98 sq. mi.). Wolves prey on wild ungulates (red deer [*Cervus elaphus*], roe deer [*Capreolus capreolus*] and wild boars [*Sus scrofa*]).

never heard wolves before, and Krzysztof had never heard them so close up. I was also amazed, as I had expected to work for all of July before getting an answer. Nothing had prepared me for a reply on the first night, and even less for one on the first call! We had been very lucky. The pack continued howling spontaneously for about an hour, then they apparently moved north.

Throughout July, the wolves replied to our calls 10 times at that same place. I was fairly sure that it must be a rendezvous site and that the den was located nearby. In August, Artur searched the area carefully. He found many places leveled by wolves, bones of prey and even the lower jaw of a wolf pup that had died of an unknown cause. I visited this

place in late August. It was similar to the wolf rendezvous sites I have seen in the Bialowieza Forest and the Bieszczady Mountains. We searched around the rendezvous site, but we did not find the den. In fall, Artur regularly saw wolf tracks in mud and sand, and he also found many scats. About Christmas Krzysztof found a dead horse that had been dumped in the forest. Wolves had apparently found the carcass and had been feeding from it. When I went back to the Holy Cross Forest just before New Year's Eve, I found seven scats and many wolf prints on sandy forest roads in the area surrounding the carcass. In mid-January, shortly after the late arrival of snow, Artur found the pack and did many kilometers of snow-tracking.

CORRECTIONS:

“Notes from Home” in the Fall 2007 issue of *International Wolf* contains several errors. The Sigurd Olson (not “Olsen”) Environmental Institute of Northland College is in Ashland, Wisconsin, not Michigan. Lynn Lewis was incorrectly named Lynn Davis. In the photo on page 16 Lynn Lewis was mistakenly identified as Pam Troxell. We regret the errors.

In addition, we questioned foresters, hunters and other people about wolves in the region. The presence of wolves had been recorded in a radius of 70 kilometers (43 miles) around the Holy Cross Forest since the mid-1980s but not in the forest itself. The last record of wolves in the Holy Cross Forest was from 1953, when wolves had killed two sheep in a village located near the forest. Wolves had then disappeared, being most likely exterminated during the state-organized killing campaign, as had most wolves in Poland. In the early 1970s probably only about 100 wolves survived in northeast Poland and in the south, in the Carpathians. The persistence of wolves west of the Vistula River was doubtful. In 1975 the status of wolves changed from pest to game species. Since that date, wolves have recovered, and breeding wolves were recorded 40 kilometers (25 miles) southeast of Holy Cross Forest and 30 kilometers (19 miles)

northwest in the mid-1980s. One of these packs was entirely poisoned, and the other one disappeared after two years. The other records were single wolves either legally shot until 1995, or poached after 1995, when the status of the wolves was upgraded to a strictly protected species. Apparently the breeding pack we observed is part of general wolf recovery in the region. This process seems to be limited by the poaching of wolves by hunters, rather than by prey numbers or habitat, which I think are sufficient.

Step by step I developed a project on the side of my regular research activities. In cooperation with Artur and with the help of other friends we are now able to monitor wolf presence in the area. We all hope that wolves will be able to survive in the Holy Cross Forest and the region and that our small efforts will contribute to their recovery. But whenever I am there, I cannot help but think about further steps. Could I track wolves with a radio-telemetry antenna along all the forest roads I know well from my youth? Where should traps be set?

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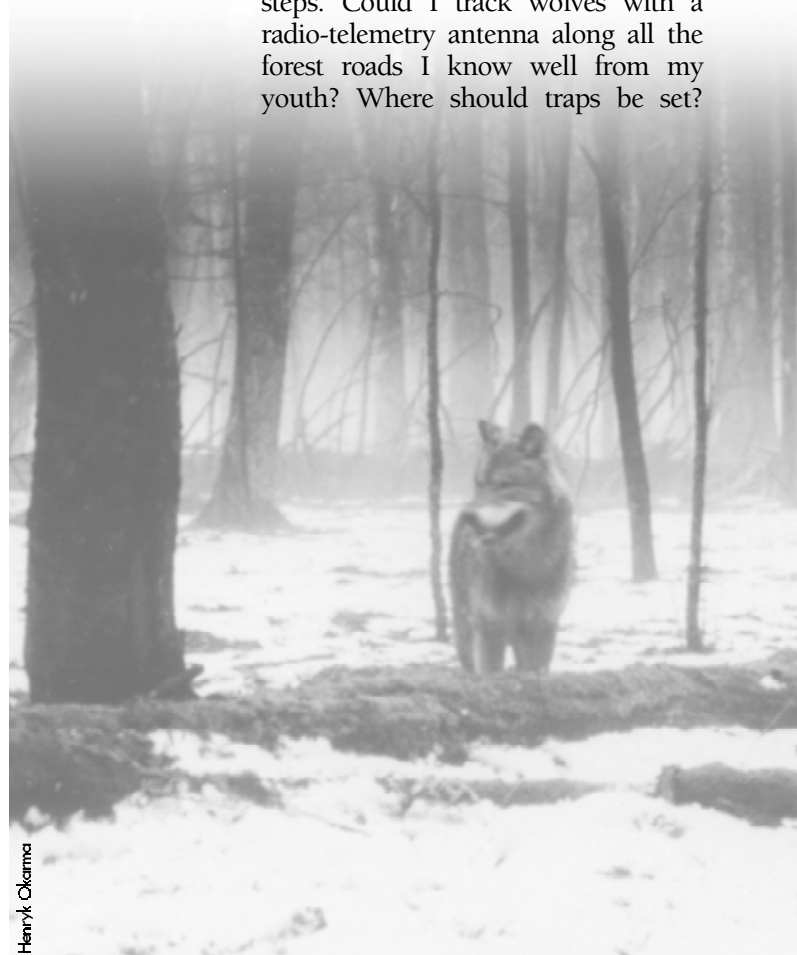
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Henryk Okarma

Would it be possible to hear the signal of a wolf's radio collar from my mother's house? It is difficult to say if these thoughts will ever become reality, but my mother said, "It seems like wolves will make you a more regular visitor here," and then she smiled. ■

Roman Gula is a research scientist at the Museum and Institute of Zoology, Polish Academy of Sciences. Since 2000 he has lived in Ustrzyki Dolne, a small town in the Bieszczady Mountains, the eastern-most part of the Polish Carpathians, where he is conducting research on the ecology of wolves.

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Sławomir Strzyżewski

Left: Bartosz Pirga (left) and Roman Gula track wolves using radio telemetry as part of their work for the Bieszczady Wolf Project.



Archives of Bieszczady Wolf Project

Bartosz Pirga (left) and Roman Gula, who work for Bieszczady Wolf Project, handle a female wolf. The wolf's eyes are covered to protect them.



Kerlyn Berg

Wolves in Minnesota Have Lost a Good Friend

Jean Braveheart, founder and director of Minnesota Wolf Alliance, died from a long battle with cancer

Jean Braveheart fought for the wolf's protection and helped to enlighten people through education.

July 20, 2007. The wolf defined Jean. She believed that its fate was intertwined with Native people and their culture. "What happens to the wolf happens to the earth," Jean would always say. Jean saw great value in this animal both spiritually and ecologically.

Through Minnesota Wolf Alliance, Jean sponsored many events. In winter 1998 she held a rally at the state capitol. In fall 1998 Minnesota Wolf Alliance held its first "Spirit of the Wolf Walk" in Duluth. The following year the second "Spirit of the Wolf Walk" was held in Minneapolis. Many people turned out for these events. As an advisor, Jean represented Minnesota Wolf Alliance to the Minnesota Wolf Roundtable meetings during 1998. All through her battle with cancer, Jean continued to fight for the wolf's protection and helped to enlighten people through education.

Linda Hatfield