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WolfPrint

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Aims of The UK Wolf Conservation Trust

- To enhance the conservation, scientific knowledge and public awareness of the environment.
- To stimulate greater interest in Wolves, their food, their habitat and their behaviour.
- To provide opportunities for both ethological research and for people to interact with Wolves.
- To improve the chances of survival of European Wolves in the wild.
- To set up an education programme for schools, conservationists and dog trainers.

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E ditorial



Wolf conservation takes place in human dominated landscapes. And therein lies the dichotomy: on the one hand, our technological and industrial advancements distance us further from the natural world than we have ever been, but it is these very same technologies that are leading us to encroach on wild habitats as we seek out more and more of the planet's resources.

In addition, although we have gradually become more enlightened about environmental issues, more and more of us do not have any real connection with nature, and we have lost valuable knowledge. We no longer 'know' how to behave or react in situations that would have been second-nature to our ancestors. It is human nature to use 'stories' in an attempt to understand the world around us. This used to be in the form of myths and legends, and stories were often a necessary tool in learning how to survive in the wilderness. Now that we no longer live in the 'wilderness', the stories have changed and our representations of the natural world are much more anthropomorphic, and Disneyfied versions of animals that bear no resemblance to the real thing.

So now we are faced with a growing problem. We encroach on wild habitats, taking with us our social constructs of wild animals that are very often not true representations. The animals themselves are affected by our activities and the modifications we make to the landscape and consequently to their behaviours, which in turn leads to increasing encounters, with sometimes devastating results for both humans and wildlife.

One of the recurring themes throughout this particular issue is human/wolf encounters, some as a result of habituation, others as a result of human activity (hunting, mining, logging, etc). In a remote area of Saskatchewan, Canada, a young man recently lost his life (see page 14 – Wolves and Humans: Shared Landscapes). The investigation thus far is inconclusive as to whether he was killed by wolves or a black bear, or whether they were simply scavenging. Whatever, the cause of death of the young man, the incident has generated a lot of media interest, and will continue to do so. The topic of habituation is also something that threads through many articles published in Wolf Print.

Last October, I heard a presentation by Josip Kusak in which he told two stories of two individual wolves that had come into contact with local villagers. The tales highlight some of the different attitudes towards wolves (see page 10).

Emre Can is based in Turkey and is currently working in wolf and bear conservation. In an interview with Pierre Zuppiroli and Lise Donnez, Emre talks about his work and the attitudes of people there (see page 8).

I am pleased to report that, following his move to Boston, Bill Lynn is now back with us with the latest edition of *Ethos*. Although scientific research has done a great deal to further our knowledge and understanding of wolves and their behaviour, science alone doesn't provide us with the whole picture, and it doesn't help that wildlife conservation in the United States is heavily mired in legislative action from both pro and anti wolf groups. In the midst of all this legal madness, Bill reminds us that it is easy to forget the real issues, which ought to be about trying to co-exist with other creatures on the planet in an ethical way.

Finally, I would like to welcome a new member of the team. Chris Senior joins us as Assistant Editor. Chris has been a regular contributor to Wolf Print and we agreed that his role should be on more formal footing. As well as being an excellent writer, Chris also takes some pretty stunning photographs so I'm glad to have him on board.

FRONT COVER PICTURE CREDIT: PETER PHELAN



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ETHOS - Breaking the Silence



An interview with Ozgun Emre Can on The Wolves In Turkey

by Pierre Zuppiroli and Lise Donnez

Emre is currently researching for his PhD at the Middle East Technical University and is a member of the IUCN's (The World Conservation Union) Wolf, Cat and Bear Specialist Groups.

Emre has previously written articles and updates for Wolf Print and given a presentation at one of the UK Wolf Conservation Trust seminars.

Pierre and Lise: Emre, we had the opportunity to meet you at the World Wolf Congress, November 2003 in Banff, Canada. At this event gathering some 400 scientists and wolf conservationists you told that wolf attacks on human beings had been always claimed in Turkey. In March 2004 there were some rumours that attacks on humans had taken place in Erzurum and Hakkari in Eastern Turkey. What exactly is going on?

Emre: Pierre, wolves have been accused of attacking people for many years in Turkey. This is often presented as fact, and it is difficult to question the claims of wolf attacks when talking to authorities and locals. I have been following such claims of wolf attacks on humans since 1998. News of alleged wolf attacks appears on local television channels all over Turkey and therefore more people are now being made aware of the claims of wolf attacks on humans. However, I must say that not all claims appear on the news.

The events in Erzurum and Hakkari were circulated in the national press, and also received media coverage in Germany, Norway, Sweden and possibly in some other countries. From what I heard from colleagues in those countries, it seems that the Turkish wolf stories are heavily used by anti-wolf lobbies.

One of the so called "wolf attacks" happened in Erzurum. One animal, which was a wolf according to local authorities, attacked a group of children in a remote field site and one boy was killed. The local authorities announced that they identified "wolf" tracks around the body and "a wolf" was responsible for the unfortunate event. In fact, even biologists and hunters may confuse wolf and dog tracks with each other. The area was a place where feral dog packs are known to occur and there have been cases of dog attacks on local people during the last couple of years. There are also chicken farms in the area and they dispose of dead chickens and related wastes in the district and this supports the feral dogs that travel in packs of 5-10 or more. The unfortunate event

happened during the day between 12.00 pm and 2.00 pm. The victim was in a group of children, and they were playing in a remote field site. The children saw the animal running towards them and screamed "a dog is coming!" but the last child left behind was killed. Several days later, the same local authorities in Erzurum and news sources announced that a "dog" which is believed to have attacked and killed the boy was itself killed. The picture and the news appeared in the media but as one can imagine, it did not appear on the front pages this time.

The second event that really shocked everyone, and received enormous media coverage, happened in Hakkari. According to the news, wolves attacked people in a village and injured 15 of them. This time, contradictory news items appeared in the press and on television. According to one news source one wolf attacked the people; according to another four wolves attacked the people. I made this observation to the editor of a national news television channel.

According to some news sources, it was a pack of wolves that attacked the people. However, this is not realistic; we expect that a rabid wolf (that is at the stage of attacking people) would run away from its pack. Also, contrary to the information presented on television and in newspapers, no one had seen a pack of wolves or even two wolves together in the vicinity. The likeliest scenario is that there was only one rabid wolf or one rabid dog involved. In fact, there have been several cases in that region where feral dogs have attacked children before and that is why some of the locals officially contacted the local authorities and complained about the dog attacks on people in the region.

In the days following, the local authorities shot an animal which they identified as "wolf" and sample tissue was sent to a state laboratory for a rabies test, which was positive. From my experience in other countries, I cannot be sure about the wolf which was found to have rabies. In such situations, I have found that the officials usually announce that they have found rabies even when they have not done so. This is because they usually don't like to take the risk of diagnosing rabies. If the person who has been attacked develops rabies then this is clearly not good for the officer who tested the samples.

In this particular case it was announced by a news source that one child (some of the victims were children) was diagnosed to have rabies. In that same period, a suspicious animal was shot in the vicinity which was thought to be a wolf. It was no surprise to me, that the animal was a dog, not a wolf! As far as I know, they just threw away the carcass and did not test it for rabies.



Photo: Tugba Can

Emre with pup.

I have previously surveyed this region, and I can say that this is one of the remotest and wildest places in Turkey. Some villages have no contact at all with the rest of the country during a two month period when there are very severe winter conditions. In fact, it is hard to believe how people survive in those areas. When I consider the wolf attack stories from Russia and India, and if I were to make a list of the places where wolf attacks are likely to occur in Turkey, then I would put the name of this area on the top of the list.

Pierre and Lise. You mentioned feral dogs. Do we have a similar issue in Turkey as in Ethiopia where we see a human expansion on the wolf habitat and the surrounding feral dogs transmitting rabies to some wolf populations?

Emre. The feral dogs are a serious problem in different regions of Turkey. I, and others, have observed feral dogs attacking roe deer in the wild for example. Dogs are in national parks and in other protected areas but we do not know their actual impact, their role in disease transmission etc. Rabies is also an issue in Turkey. We do not have documented case where rabies has been transmitted to wolves from feral dogs but I believe the transmission happens both ways in Turkey. Some time ago, I searched the official health records for information about the transmission of rabies from wolves to people in Turkey. It was interesting to see that there was only one record that says rabies was transmitted to a man by a wolf. This may indicate that rabid wolves do not pose a significant threat to people in Turkey, which is similar to the situation in other countries with wolves.

Pierre and Lise: It is rare that we get any specific data on wolves in Turkey. Once I saw the number of 1000 with a question mark. It is not a lot for a big country like Turkey. How many wolves would you estimate that there are in Turkey today and is the number declining or increasing?



Photo: Aykut Ince

Emre. Dave Mech and Luigi Boitani presented the number 1000, as the possible wolf population size in Turkey in their landmark publication "Wolves" in 2003. I did not have chance to comment on this number before its publication but I can say that it is safe to say that Turkey holds a wolf population of about 7000 individuals. There are some local extinctions especially in the western parts of Turkey and the wolf population is declining in Turkey as a whole.

Pierre and Lise: As we understand it, the wolf is not protected by law in Turkey. Is this something that is going to change also in view of Turkey's potential entry into the EU?

Emre. Historically, the wolf has officially been considered a pest species and so it was hunted throughout the year without any limits. It was only in 2003 that the wolf received a game species status. Now people cannot hunt wolves without limits according to the law, but since the wolf has been considered a pest until very recently, it will take some years before people really learn that the wolf has game species status now. This means that the wolf can only be hunted using established quotas. The EU process has an overall positive effect on nature conservation but I can say that from the carnivore conservation and management point of view, so far the EU has had no effect at all. We will see what will happen in the near future. Since we have other species like the hyena and caracal in Turkey, and the wolf and bear population is higher than that of EU countries, I believe that the EU has to pay special attention to the carnivores of Turkey during the EU process.

Pierre and Lise: The co-habitation between wolves and people is a challenge around the world. Therefore are there any programmes you are undertaking to improve the relationship between wolves and people in your country and when will you know that you have achieved success?

Emre. The Kangal dogs are believed to be effective against limiting wolf damage to livestock. Although there is no scientific study investigating this claim, it is an old tradition to keep these particular dogs against wolves. There is currently a project that provides Kangals to livestock owners for protecting their livestock against wolves. I hope that I will be able to say more about this



Shepherd with Livestock Guarding Dog.

issue in the next year when I have some data. But I would suggest that the national and local authorities encourage people to have Kangals where wolves and livestock are found together.

Pierre and Lise: What kind of support do you get from the international community to achieve your conservation objectives? Is there something we can do to help?

Emre. I conducted a research project on the wolves in Turkey with support from the European Union between 1998-2000. This was for my graduate thesis and it was the first scientific study on wolves in Turkey. Over the years, we have implemented several studies on carnivores and carnivore-human conflict but it is difficult for us to find support from both national and international funding providers. In Turkey, I do not think that we can say there is a tradition of supporting NGOs, as is the case in Europe and the USA. Turkey also gets little support from international donors compared to its rich biodiversity and country size. Recently, I focused on conservation and management priorities for the wolf and I am working on a draft wolf action plan for Turkey. Perhaps you can spread the word that we need support to complete it.

Pierre and Lise: Your "Kangal" (Turkish livestock guarding dog) gets a lot of good international press! Apparently it is still widely used in your country and it works very effectively under extreme meteorological conditions. How many "Kangals" are there in Turkey and are they still favoured by shepherds over other dog "breeds"?

Emre. I do not think there are reliable figures available about the number of Kangals but there is a need to promote the breeding of Kangals in Turkey. The hybridisation of Kangals is a serious threat to the breed. Therefore, we have to carefully select the right individuals and establish a countrywide breeding program. One issue that shepherds raise is they can not easily find Kangals. It is a strong dog and I know that people have been using them to limit wolf, cheetah and leopard damage to livestock in different parts of the world.

Pierre and Lise: Last but not least, we had the wonderful opportunity to visit your country in March for the first time. We were emotionally touched by the unconditioned hospitality of the people we met in the small villages we visited. What are the areas you would recommend that wolf conservationists visit to optimize their possibilities of perhaps finding some wolf scats or seeing some tracks?

Emre. I have had the opportunity of travelling to different parts of world and I can also say from my own experience that Turkish people are among the most hospitable people. To try and see wolves, I suggest going to the forest areas around Ankara-Bolu, Sivas, and Erzurum. Perhaps the easiest area to travel to for a visitor to track wolves is Ankara-Bolu region. Here it is fairly easy to find wolf scats and tracks in the field, given that one can identify the scats and tracks correctly.

Pierre and Lise: Thanks, Emre, for your valuable input and for providing new insights into a country with lots of natural treasures still to be discovered and explored - and certainly preserved. To conclude our interview would you like to make some final remarks?



Photo: Aykut Ince

Emre. There are around 18,000 forest villages (an official term for us) in Turkey and they hold a population of about 18 million people and most of those people live in wolf country. If the wolves attack people as frequently as people imagine, we would hear the news and reports on the "wolf attacks" on a regular basis, just like we hear the news about traffic accidents. But this is not the case. One must also remember that there are millions of visitors travelling in wolf country in North America.

But if we go back to some of the principal questions:

Do rabid wolves attack people? Yes, of course they do if people are around.

Do healthy wolves attack people? As the recent incident from North America where a healthy wolf attacked a 55 year old miner, and the death of 22 year old person by wolf attack on November 8 2005 in Saskatchewan, reminds yes healthy wolves may attack humans under certain conditions.

But this does not mean that all wolves should be considered a serious threat to humans living in or visiting wolf country. Wolves and other wild animals are unpredictable. Wild animals and even domestic pets have been known to present a serious threat to people under certain circumstances. The danger may lie more in how we as humans behave in the presence of a wild animal and not the other way around. Today, wolves rarely, if ever, kill humans. We can guess that they have done so in the past, during the times when humans did not have guns. Therefore I do not think that we can take a position against the possibility that attacks on human may occur. I believe they are just very rare events.

Editor's Note

Also in this issue we have reported on the death of the 22 year old man in Saskatchewan, and the evidence is currently inconclusive. It is not certain whether the young man was killed by a black bear or by wolves. See the article on Page 14 for further details.

Lise Donnez is a speaker at the next UK Wolf Conservation Trust seminar to be held on 9th April 2006. If you haven't already booked, then do so straight away. Tickets for the seminars now sell out very fast, and they are an event not to be missed.