

Rewilding Europe with the wolf: can we turn conflict into coexistence?

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Where are we today?



Wolves
10 populations
c. 12.000 individuals



Living with success



500 million people!

Living with success



34 countries plus 35 federal /autonomous states

Aims of the talk

Two old themes;

- Conflict – do we understand it?
- Coexistence – how does it look?

Two emerging discourses;

- Rewilding
- Ecosystem services



Something to remember

«Large carnivores» are a useful functional guild for conservation planning, but

.... the wolf is a special case!

Almost everything is extreme – this is the fascination, the blessing and the «curse» of the species.



Understanding conflicts

Historical wolf – we are not starting with a blank page

- Bounties, extermination, control
- Loss of human life
- Danger to livelihoods



Understanding conflicts

Biological wolf – economic, material, tangible conflicts

- Depredation on livestock
- Competition with hunters
- Risk for human safety



Understanding conflicts

Symbolic wolf – values, ethics, ideology

- Place of people in nature – and the nature of nature!
- Defining progress
- Intrinsic value and other values
- Modernity vs tradition
- Rural vs urban



Understanding conflicts

Political wolf – power, influence, control

- Institutions and procedures
- Relationships between individuals
- Influence of lives and livelihood
- Instrumentalisation of the wolf for agendas
- The fear of outside influence



Understanding conflicts

Distribution of these conflicts

- Conflicts with the biological wolf are universal
- But the extent to which these morph into conflicts with the symbolic and political wolf varies
- Specially intense in areas of wolf recolonisation – such as France, Norway, Sweden, Finland ++++

Understanding conflicts

Wolf wars – serving somebody’s agenda

- Hyperactive anti-wolf individuals
- Spreading of disinformation and fear
- Conspiracy theories
- Builds to a mass hysteria – civil disobedience and tragic consequences
- Misses chance to address real issues –and sacrifices the wolf as a scapegoat




Understanding conflicts

Complexity of conflict

- Key issue is to recognise the diversity of conflicts and the need to address all dimensions.
- Recognise the potential for politicalisation!



Elusive coexistence

There is no «solution»

- Can't expect everyone to love the wolf
- Coexistence is about tolerance and acceptance
 - Tolerance of the wolf's presence
 - Acceptance for the process that has led to it
 - Acceptance of the institutional frames of governance



Elusive coexistence

From polarisation to pluralism

- Plurality of views
- Pragmatism in approaches
- Adapt to temporal and spatial contexts
- Different management in different places



Elusive coexistence

How to get there?

- Knowledge base – even in a post-modern world
- Process is important - balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches
 - The challenge of scales – local vs transboundary
- Product – adapt to local context and changing times
- Essentially an exercise in democracy

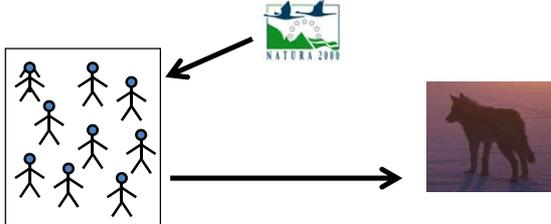
Maintaining coexistence

Don't mess with things that work

- Things work well in many places – especially southern and eastern Europe
- Must avoid doing anything that can change this
- Keep wolf management as a technical discussion within well established frames
- Prevent wolves become political symbols

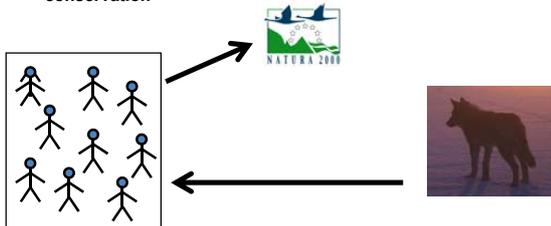
The place of legislation

• Conservation should not be motivated by legislation!



The place of legislation

- Legislation should be a response to a society's desire for conservation



- It is crucial to maintain the mandate for conservation agenda
- However, once in place, the rule of law must be followed
- But, laws must be implemented so as to maintain their legitimacy

Rewilding

What does «rewilding» bring to the table?

- What is it?
- From «Pleistocene rewilding» to urban foxes!
- Yellowstone vs Europe
- Contrasting views of «natural» and «wilderness»
- A real mix of values, surrogate arguments, science and pseudo-science

Rewilding

Rewilding at its most controversial

- Rewilding = rewildernessing = fundamentalist
- A general model for managing the landscape
- Controversy, alienation, strange alliances

Rewilding at its best

- Building on a gradient of wildness
- Integrating as much wild as possible into all landscapes along the gradient
- From the urban to the near wilderness
- Plurality of approaches = pragmatic
- Light and respectful hands – but rarely hands-off

Rewilding a la Europe ?



Rewilding a la Europe !!



Ecosystem services

Connecting ecosystem services and wildlife?

- ES is now mainstream at highest level = IPBES
- Uncertain link to biodiversity – especially that with low euro value – and even worse for that which comes with a high cost.
- Wolves will almost always fall into the black box of «cultural services»



ipBes

Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services



Ecosystem services

The crucial reminder

- Living on planet Earth requires resources
- Exploit our own – or externalise environmental costs to developing countries?
- Remind us of the need for environmental sustainability as the real bottom line in both management practice and ethics

Ecosystem services

Wolves in a wider context

- They are not the only policy issue!
- Landscape has multiple users – no place for fundamentalist views – must find a way to integrate as many competing interests as possible!
- Land sparing vs land sharing debate is largely non-applicable to wolves because of scale!
 - We have to share.

The need to share space



Conclusions

- Wolves challenge us as individuals, as members of society, and as members of the biotic community of life on the planet.
- In danger of turning symbols of a conservation success and nature's resilience into symbols of conflict
- If we get it right we can reverse this if we can reframe the debate into terms of democracy and sustainability.



Thank you!

