

### A Case of Mistaken Identity

In a society where dogs are considered important family members, why are wolves, close relatives of dogs, considered worthless? How is it ethical to be protecting and pampering animals owned by humans but turning a blind eye toward nature's helpless wolves being gunned down from helicopters?

It has been argued that wolves cannot be compared to pets because they are ruthless and violent killing machines. But in truth, they are more peaceful creatures than they have been depicted as in the past. Ultimately, wolves are not vicious animals and are in fact a benefit to society by balancing our ecosystems.

One of the first arguments made against wolves is that they are killers, and have been portrayed as killers for many years. People begin to believe that wolves are genuinely evil from classic bedtime stories such as 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'The Three Little Pigs.' In books and movies, wolves are shown and described to have big scary teeth, blood-shot eyes, and a ravenous stare at the nearest person around. Yet in a study of wolf-human interactions in the US and Canada, there were only 80 cases, both aggressive and nonaggressive, and none were fatal to people. In fact, in most cases, the wolves had either been provoked and were acting in self defense, or the wolves had rabies. There is currently no death on record of anyone killed by a wolf. (Wolves and Humans).

The chances of being injured by wolves in a wolf country are slim. According to the International Wolf Center, a person is more likely to be killed by a dog (man's "best friend"), struck by lightning, stung by a bee, or end up in a car accident than being

attacked by an unprovoked, healthy wolf. Contrary to popular belief, a wolf will avoid a confrontation with humans. The ones that do confront people have often been 'habituated,' which occurs when they are fed by people with good intentions. (Top Ten Questions)

While wolves do not kill humans, they do hunt deer for food. Some people look down upon wolves for this fact of nature because deer are seen as cute, innocent and harmless creatures. On the contrary, wolves are doing Mother Nature a favor by hunting the growing deer population.

The same innocent and harmless deer population is growing and spreading like weeds and destroying the wildlife around them. The deer are out of control. According to an article in the US News & World Report, they are devouring the shrubs, raiding farmers' fields and running across highways

It's become costly for people in many ways. Deer around farmlands destroy crops, harming business for farmers and their customers. Additionally, the average cost of a deer-car collision can be about \$2000, which could happen to anyone driving through the countryside. This is more than the nearly nonexistent cost of having wolves in the wild. Having wolves to cut down the deer population would be the most cost effective solution for a society with a deer problem.

William McShea of the Smithsonian Institute conducted a study on how deer and elk are affecting their habitats. In areas where other species competed with deer for food sources, the deer population would continue to grow as some of the other species decreased in number to as little as 10% of the population of their species in "deer-free" areas. McShea has proven that deer nearly depleted their habitats of the insects that rare

birds would feed upon, thus driving the birds away to find a new home. With wolves to control the deer population, the deer wouldn't be able to devour all their food sources and they could live in harmony in their habitats and a greater variety of species.

As mentioned before, wolves are not killing machines. If they were re-introduced to areas with deer overpopulation predicaments, they would gradually stabilize the problem. They are majestic creatures that don't kill for pleasure, just for food. This is the same for most animals of the Animal Kingdom.

In this way they are more 'humane' than humans because people sometimes kill animals for fun, fur, or in the case of wolves, just out of fear and hatred. On average, hunters kill nearly double the number of hunting game, such as deer and elk, than wolves prey upon annually. (International Wolf Center).

There are some concerns that reinstating wolves into the wild will be an economic burden on locals. However, not only do wolves play a key role in maintaining our ecosystems, but they can also be beneficial to the economy. In rural areas, wolves draw in tourists eager to see the endangered animals. Profits generated from ecotourism would surpass any costs to reintroduce wolves into the wild, which is ultimately an advantage to local residents. (Defenders of Wildlife)

A study conducted by William Rosen at Cornell University looked into tourism interests in North Carolina. He found that about 70% of the people surveyed were more interested in visiting North Carolina with the presence of wolves. Furthermore, the ecotourism in the area could generate about \$170 million annually, because of the wolves' presence. (Defenders of Wildlife)

According to a study by Dr Gail Lash and Pamela Black of Ursa International, the presence of wolves in our forests reduces repair costs created by small, overpopulating animals. This covers the costs of controlling those populations as well as land and road repairs.

Wolves play a positive role in the balance of our ecosystem by controlling the deer, raccoon, rabbit, nutria and opossum populations. They can also boost our economy through ecotourism and saving repair costs. So if wolves are so beneficial to our society, why are they still on the receiving end of a gunshot? Why is it that in American society we embrace so many animals but not wolves?

In Native American culture, wolves were respected creatures. These native tribes recognized similarities between humans and wolves in their devotion to family and characteristic of defending its home against outsiders. In some cases, they envied wolves for their superior and cooperative hunting skills.

American culture could learn something from the viewpoint of Native Americans. Wolves are not the violent and vicious killers that ate Little Red Riding Hood's grandma. They are peacekeepers, balancing the fate of the ecosystem in their paws. They do not kill people, but instead continue to help them by controlling the deer population. Killing these majestic animals will only lead to the destruction of our ecosystems.

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