



The truth about wolves: Facts vs. fiction

Inescapably, the realization was being borne in upon my preconditioned mind that the centuries-old and universally accepted human concept of wolf character was a palpable lie... From this hour onward, I would go open-minded into the lupine world and learn to see and know the wolves, not for what they were supposed to be, but for what they actually were.

– Farley Mowat, *Never Cry Wolf*

Around the world and over the centuries, some cultures have honored wolves as noble and spiritual, while others have maligned them as evil and dangerous. With the development of wildlife science has come a much better understanding of wolf behavior. But many misconceptions about wolves remain—sometimes these beliefs prevent the animal's recovery and survival.

Are wolves dangerous?

Wolves are big, strong predators, so many people see them as dangerous. But there has never been a documented case in North America of a healthy, wild wolf killing or injuring a human being since records started being kept in the 1800s. Any attacks that have been documented occurred because wolves had rabies or were habituated by humans (like wolf-dog hybrids kept as pets). In contrast, millions of people are attacked each year by domestic dogs.

Do wolves kill livestock?

Livestock can be easy prey for all predators, and ranchers and farmers do suffer some losses. But other causes (like weather, disease, and calving problems) cause far more livestock deaths than

predation by wolves. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in the Northern Rockies region in 2001, wolves were responsible for only .03% of cattle and 1.3% of sheep deaths from all causes and 1% of cattle and 0.4% of sheep deaths due to predators.

Improved livestock husbandry practices make a big difference, like rotating and guarding herds, keeping them away from wolf denning and rendezvous sites, and removing dead cows and sheep from fields so wolves don't get used to feeding on livestock. Some organizations and states also compensate livestock producers for losses caused by wolves.

Do wolves kill dogs?

It's natural for wild canids (dog species) to defend their territories—wolves do so against other wolves, coyotes, and domestic dogs. As a result, wolves occasionally attack and kill dogs they see as a threat. This can happen when hunters let dogs range free and pets are left outside homes in areas with wolves.

There are many ways to reduce wolf-dog conflict and protect pets from potential harm, like keeping them collared and belled, closely supervised, and away

from wolf denning and rendezvous sites at certain times of the year.

Do wolves reduce hunting opportunities?

Wolves hunt and kill the same animals humans do (notably deer and elk). However, there is little evidence to support contentions that wolves cause unhealthy decreases in the size of herds and reduce hunting opportunities for humans. For example, Minnesota had its highest record deer harvests in 2003 and 2004, while at the same time supporting approximately 2,000 wolves.

Factors like harsh winter weather, traffic, disease, and parasite outbreaks have a far greater impact on herds than wolves, which kill a relatively small number of animals.

In some places where wolves have returned after a long absence, deer and elk have become more vigilant and move around more—although this can make hunting more challenging in certain places, it doesn't mean that game animals aren't available for hunting.



Aren't there enough wolves?

With much of the nation's land now developed and natural environments very changed, the large numbers of wildlife that once existed will probably never return. The goal of wolf recovery is to have healthy, wild populations of wolves living and surviving in as much as their former ranges as possible.

This goal is a key part of an important law, the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973. And as studies and polls show,

public opinion is on the side of more wolf recovery.

Although there are significant wolf populations in Alaska and the wolves in the Great Lakes and Northern Rockies regions are recovering, wolves are just beginning to

recover in the Southwest and Southeast and are still missing from the Northeast and other places. And state management plans, regulations, and public attitudes sometimes compromise the health and survival of existing wolf populations.

Further land conservation, education, and recovery efforts are clearly needed, and wolves will require protection and support for a long time to come.

The Coalition to Restore the Eastern Wolf (CREW) is a group of local, regional, and national organizations working to recover healthy wolf populations in as much of its former range in the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada as is feasible. CREW believes that doing so is critical to improving natural conditions and keeping environments whole throughout the region.

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