

ANXIETY THROUGH THE AGES

In his new book, "Wolves in Russia," Will N. Graves chronicles the reasons wolves are feared by the people who must live with them.



Introduction by Barney Nelson, Ph.D.

“Wolves in Russia” is a must-read book for wolf advocates, ranchers, college professors, government agencies, and those who might be camping in wolf territory. Will Graves’ balanced investigation provides rare honesty and sanity in a groundbreaking and illuminating collection of Russian wolf science and documented predation on humans and livestock. The book paints a vivid picture of government suppression of information; it documents the effect of an unarmed population on wolf behavior; and it points to cycles of terror and starvation that correspond to wolf population explosions.

The author led a far-flung, adventurous life. During the Mexican outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease, he served in 1950 as chief of a horseback cattle-vaccinating brigade where he became interested in wolves spreading diseases among cloven-hoofed animals. Next, he went on to careers with U.S. Air Force and Army intelligence in Germany during the Cold War, and as assistant consular at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. His combined employment in livestock diseases and national security eventually led to an ever increasing interest in wolves. After a lifetime of government service, Graves retired, fluent in four languages—English, Spanish, German, and Russian.

While in Russia, he became friends with numerous Russian professors, scientists, and hunters, amassing a huge collection of data, oral interviews, and literature on Russian wolves. His research spanned the centuries as he sifted through government documents, magazine and newspaper articles, travel diaries, village parish registers, hunter and hunting club records, and bounty payments. Instead of simply totaling numbers, he methodically reports every incident, month by month, year by year; every research study, every interview.

Although sometimes his method seems tedious, it prevents naysayers from accusing him of exaggeration. Eventually his details of wolf attacks on children and unarmed people walking or working alone begin to form a pattern in the reader’s mind. The accumulation of victims’ names, ages, dates, places, witnesses, and sources as well as the health, weight, and gender of the attacking wolves eventually becomes convincing. Periodically, he summarizes his extensive collection of examples with the low-key, objective voice of a scientist: “It is sometimes suggested that

only old, sick, or crippled wolves attack people. The current facts do not support that belief.”

This year, with editorial help from a Canadian scientist, Graves has now published his life’s work on Russian wolves through Det-selig Enterprises, Ltd. of Calgary, Alberta, with

support from the Government of Canada and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. For more information, see Graves’ website at www.wolvesinrussia.com.

The following are excerpts from “Wolves in Russia: Anxiety through the Ages” (2007):



PHOTOS COURTESY WILL GRAVES

Will Graves in Mexico, 1950.

From the Foreword by editor Valerius Geist, Ph.D., professor emeritus of environmental science, University of Calgary

This book is a unique review of wolves as experienced in a culture much different from ours in North America. It was put to paper by an American linguist, who, to upgrade his understanding of the Russian language, began to read about wolves in Russia....

What the Russian authors take for granted, but which readers in the West may not be cognizant of, is the great poverty of the rural population especially under Communist mismanagement. Wolf depredation, and the chronic helplessness to stop it, added to that deep misery and despair.... The condition of poverty-stricken serfs was not a political priority in Russia, unlike the control of peasant rebellions and revolutions. This led to social policies in the Russian Empire that generated an environment in which wolves were able to thrive and maintain themselves. It is here where we can learn from history.

I have been as guilty as anyone of thinking, without adequate investigation or interest, that the Russian experience with wolves was irrelevant to us in the West. I regret to say that it is not! It was an error on my part—a deep error. I would have been glad to report that scholarship made me abandon that error, but it has not. It was brutal personal experi-

ence that did it.

A pack of wolves settled for about four years near our home on Vancouver Island, Canada, and behaved in typical “Russian” fashion. This most “un-American behavior” of wolves lasted until the last pack member was shot three years later.... Wolves in Russia or North America behave in identical fashion—depending on the circumstances. Circumstance is crucial, not geography. The wolves here and there are the same animals, acting in all cases with brutal logic to fit the circumstances. That’s why the Russian experience as told in his book is so important for us in the West. North Americans have an opportunity to learn from others in good time to adopt management measures that minimize dangers and problems with wolves. If we fail to discuss the Russian experience and continue with myopic and currently fashionable romantic visions about wolves, which are enshrined in law, then in the long run it will be wolves, if not wildlife conservation as a whole, that will pay the price. We can learn from history that failure to manage wolves results in their decimation, if not extinction. Unfortunately, as the great philosopher Emanuel Kant once quipped, we learn from history that we do not learn from history!

Russian experiences with wolves are distant to us in part by virtue of language and attitude. North Americans are notoriously unilingual and ahistorical. We live narrowly in the universe of the English language, and even

our institutions of higher learning promote that singularity. We suffer from institutional amnesia. Consequently, historical accounts are undervalued and those scholars who buck that trend assume a maverick status. Also, scientism casts its long, dark shadow. All is not well in the scholarship of biological science....

Most North Americans today have a very benign and romantic view of wolves, in good part because they have been largely spared negative experiences. The reason is simple: an armed population. In North America wolves threatening livestock or persons met, invariably, a person with a gun who, without fanfare or publicity, killed the wolf or wolves. And if that failed, predator control officers were brought in to eliminate wolves. That is still the experience in rural Canada. And that is also my personal experience. Any outbreak of rabies also had consequences in Canada, such as the application of poisoned bait to eliminate wolves. And then there is a market in wolf fur, which also depressed wolf numbers.

Wolves in North America are, historically, shy and careful for excellent reasons. ■



Russian illustration, 1883, showing panic caused by wolves.

From the Author's Preface

I have always loved nature, animals, and the out-of-doors. I have been an avid hunter, fisherman, and sportsman since my early youth. Some of my fondest memories are hunting and target shooting with my father, primarily in Texas and Wisconsin....

I first started researching for this book about wolves in 1965 when I became disgusted with all of the highly pro-wolf—mislead-

ing and often inaccurate—western literature about wolves. I had learned a lot about wolves from reading Russian.

Most North Americans today have a very benign and romantic view of wolves—because they have been largely spared negative experiences. The reason is simple: an armed population.

By 1965 I had already been reading Russian literature about wolves and talking to many Russians about wolves for 14 years. I could not understand how any writers could call wolves the sanitarians of nature—just the opposite is true in my opinion. Some write that wolves kill only the animals they need to eat; there is endless documentation showing that wolves are wanton and surplus killers. Some write that wolves prey only or primarily on weak, sick, diseased, or crippled animals; wolves often kill healthy, fit, well-fed animals which are

superstition and old wives tales and not on facts. So, I decided to write a book to make available to the American people what I have read and learned about wolf characteristics, habits, and behaviors.

There is also much documentation about wolves in Russia and the U.S.S.R. eating people. One western author wrote that wolves in northern climates prey and exist primarily on lemmings and rodents, and not on caribou. Some write that fear of wolves is based on

Most of what I have learned is from reading Russian and from talking to Russians. In my opinion, many western writers and specialists on wolves have become enamored with these animals. It is true that wolves are highly interesting and fascinating. However, most of these pro-wolf writers are basing their conclusions primarily on emotions, and not on facts. Let us look at the facts, and let the facts speak for themselves. ■

■

From the Book

Leonid P. Sabaneev is considered to be the first scientist to write about wolves in Russia. His well-researched book, published in 1876, contained detailed information about wolves and their damage to the Russian economy. It also dealt with wolf attacks on humans.

Sabaneev wrote, "The wolf is...a menacing symbol of the poverty, helplessness and suppression of the masses of the people." Sabaneev states that V. M. Lazarevskij reported that wolves in Russia were killing more than 200 people a year in the 1800s.... Children who lived in villages were more likely than adults to become victims for several reasons: first, children usually went into the forests to pick berries and mushrooms without accompanying adults; second, children often tended and watched over cattle and sheep; third, children often mistook wolves for dogs and tried to pet them; fourth, children would often walk to and from school, sometimes along forest paths....

A single wolf will eat from 3.2 to 3.5 kilograms of meat each day; however, if it is hungry it will eat from 13 to 15 kilograms per day. The yearly requirement of one wolf is about 1.5 tons of meat, however, a wolf seldom returns to a kill so a wolf will kill many animals to reach this 1.5-ton requirement. Depending on the region, one wolf may kill each year up to 90 saiga (antelope) or 50-80

wild boar, or on an average of 50 domestic or wild reindeer. Depending on the time of the year, one wolf will eat between 4 to 4.5 kilograms of meat each day in cold weather and 5 to 6 kilograms of meat each day in the summer when feeding young. Where there are roe deer, one wolf will kill, each year, between 35 to 45 roe deer. In forested areas, one wolf may kill each year between 12 to 15 wapiti or 8 to 10 moose....

In regions where there is much hunting by wolves, the number of game animals drops sharply. Wolves become wicked from lack of food and lose their caution. Then wolves may cross roads and enter human settlements. In winter wolves may walk along streets of villages, enter farmyards and search for food in house yards. Wolves will set up ambushes for dogs. When a wolf approaches a dog in the yard, the dog will bark and the wolf will pretend to retreat. If the dog chases the wolf, another wolf may be waiting to ambush the dog. Many domestic dogs are lost in this manner....

If the wolves are able to approach within a few meters of their prey, the attack begins. They will quickly leap the last few meters and grab the prey. In killing large animals, the wolves try to grab their prey in the perineum (genital and anus) areas where the tissue is soft. Sometimes they try to grab the nose of the prey, but avoid the hooves of large prey. Wolves try to tear large pieces of soft tissue from the victim, causing large wounds which bleed profusely. The loss of blood soon weakens even the largest and healthiest animal. Wolves may rip open the abdominal cavity and begin feeding, before the animal is dead, be it large or small prey....

The primary prey of wolves in the Naryan-Marskij region was not sick and weak reindeer, but pregnant females and young ones. The herdsmen reported that wolves rarely killed the sick and weak (emaciated) animals, but on the contrary, they almost always killed the best fattened animals.

There have been five periods in Russian history when the number of wolves grew so large that, besides inflicting severe damage to the economy through predation on livestock and game, the wolves also attacked humans. Only when the damage caused by wolves had reached crisis proportions, and the public raised voices in protest, did the government pull its act together and put strict wolf-control programs into effect. In each of the five periods, these programs, with help from the public, would reduce the number of wolves to a "more or less reasonable" level. As a rule, the

government then would relax its programs or circumstances such as wars or revolutions would intervene, causing the government to abandon wolf control, and the number of wolves would soon skyrocket again to out-of-control levels. During these five periods, nature did not keep the number of wolves in balance; it took human intervention to do that....

Farley Mowat's book, "Never Cry Wolf," was published in Russian as "Please Wolves,

deputy head of the State Forestry Service, Musa Kuchukov, reported that there are now so many wolves that other wildlife such as ibex were being endangered, which has serious implications for the country's ecological balance. There are three times the number of wolves roaming Kyrgyzstan now compared to a decade ago. Officials say attacks on people and domestic animals have increased overall, almost doubling in the past nine months....

With the growth in the wolf population,



Author of "Wolves in Russia," Will Graves, center, stands with some of the Russian scientists who helped him with his research.

Don't Cry." This book began to play a role.... After reading Mowat's book, some Russians started to believe that wolves were the sanitarians of nature. The public started to believe the wolves should not be culled, but be protected. Mowat wrote that wolves never kill for fun, and that he knows no valid evidence that wolves kill more than they can use, even when the rare opportunity to do so arises. Ignored were the countless documented accounts in Czarist and Soviet literature about wanton killing by wolves—surplus killing!... However, Soviet hunters, biologists, and game managers did signal alarm....

In 2002 wolves in several districts of the Volgograd region of the Russian Federation have been preying frequently on cattle and even attacking people. Bounties paid for culling wolves do not cover the hunters' expenses, and wolf pelts are not in fashion. As a result of little hunting pressure, wolf numbers have increased, and wolves have become more impudent.... There are signals of a calamity coming from the tundra region.... It was reported in 2003 that the wolf population in Kyrgyzstan is getting out of control.... The

wolves become important in the epizootic and epidemiology of rabies. The incubation period of rabies in wolves is from eight days to three weeks. Rabies causes a drastic change in wolf behavior. Rabid wolves become agitated; they desert their packs and run far away, traveling up to 80 kilometers per day. As they move, they attack livestock and poultry. In contrast to healthy wolves, rabid wolves do not avoid people, and are attracted to any unusual noise. Rabid wolves violently attack people in villages and in fields during daylight hours. Wolf bites are extremely dangerous to humans as they are wide, deep, and often multiple. Rabid wolves attacking humans often aim for the head. Bites to the head, face, and neck are especially dangerous....

In the U.S.S.R. wolves are infected with more than 50 types of intestinal worms. Wolves cause noticeable damage to wild ungulates by carrying echinococcus, cysticercus, and coenurus, parasitic diseases that may also be caught by humans.... Free-ranging wolves can be seriously infected with cestodes. It is noticeable that in areas where there are no wolves, there are few infections in wild

animals with cysticercus....

A Soviet scientist researched the distribution and numbers of wolves in the extreme northeast of Siberia and compared this with



The pole on this Kazakhstan shepherd's saddle is being carried to fight off wolves. Will Graves replenished this man's supply of ammunition and made an instant friend.

the areas of high brucellosis infections in reindeer. He showed the results of his research on a map. In most areas with a high wolf population, there was a high incidence of brucellosis.... Humans have taken it upon themselves to protect domestic animals from parasitic and pathogenic infections but, unfortunately, have not yet done this for wild animals. Wild animals are practically

ordered hunters, police and special emergency teams to track down the wolves and kill them, including any domestic animals and pets bitten by the wolves. Ukrainian

health authorities record dozens of cases of rabies every year.

Wisdom Through the Ages from Wolves in Russia

Russian literature is filled with stories of wolves attacking and killing peasants and their livestock. Tolstoy, Chekhov, Nerkrasov,

There have been five periods in Russian history when the number of wolves grew so large that, besides inflicting severe damage to the economy through predation on livestock and game, the wolves also attacked humans.

defenseless against the devastation of infectious diseases.

It was reported from Kiev on August 7, 2005 that wolves attacked 14 people in the eastern part of the Ukraine. The attacks on the people took place on Thursday through Saturday in villages in the Zaporizhia region. A car struck one of the wolves which was determined to be rabid. All of the people attacked, including a 60-year-old woman who was seriously injured, were given rabies vaccines. Local authorities

Vavilov, Bunin, Lazarvskij, Sabaneev, Stolpyanskij and others wrote of these events. The Russian language is rich in proverbs about wolves. Russian and Kazakhian proverbs, riddles and sayings about wolves are taught to children. Proverbs are reflections of human wisdom and experiences that have stood the test of time; they provide excellent information on the Russians' attitude about wolves....

A wolf cub is also a wolf.

You cannot turn a wolf into a sheep.

A wolf will never be a sheepdog.

Strip the wolf of seven skins and it will still be a wolf.

He who keeps company with wolves, will learn to howl as a wolf.

As a wolf is like a dog, so a flatterer is like a friend.

To put the blame on elders is the nature of the wolf.

You will not be able to trap an old wolf.

Presently, if you go into almost any public library in the United States, you can readily find books about wolves and wolf behavior. Many of these books have been written especially for children. The general theme of most of these books is that human fear of the wolf is not based on fact, but that fear of the wolf is based on myths, superstitions, folklore, fairy tales, and old wives tales. But if you are able to read Russian and could read Dr. Sabaneev's book and other well-documented Russian-language, technical, and scientific literature about wolves, you would learn that fear of wolves by tens of millions of people including Russians is based on historical facts, actual events, and not on myths. ■

Today Will Graves is retired and living in Maryland with his wife Randi and son Erick. He still loves the outdoors, hunting and fishing, and stays in touch with Russian wolf scientists who have become his lifelong friends.

Hunger Breaks Down Barriers from Wolves in Russia

[This article was published in the Moscow News in November 2005. It was written by Alexei Tarasov and entitled "Rising Wolf Population in Russian Federation a Real Menace." It was translated by Graves for his book.]

Russian biologists report that in the 1990s a new generation of wolves has grown up. Today, these "new look" gray predators intrude into human habitats without the slightest fear. This is because people have lost the knack of wolf-fighting, and do not hunt the wolves. These predators are again making trouble. In recent years wolves have besieged not only remote isolated fields and foresters' outposts in the taiga, but they are regularly spotted in suburban areas and large villages. Where lonely predators used to appear sporadically, today they come in packs. They attack dogs in orchards just out of the city of Krasnoyarsk.

Wolf hunters in Siberia say that the unprecedented wolf population explosion goes back to the early 1990s. The rise in the wolf numbers has been observed in all parts



Russian illustration from 1882, when eagles were used to kill wolves and prevent depredation. BELOW: Gray wolf.

of the Russian Federation. It has presently reached such a level that this intelligent and extremely cautious predator needs to trespass on the human habitat. This is because in areas devoid of human presence, wolves have already hunted up everything there was for them to eat. Hunger breaks down barriers and the lack of food forces them to reach out to new areas.

In the winter of 2000-2001, temperatures dropped below minus 50 centigrade. Long cold spells and deep snow forced the wolves to look for food wherever it was available. Wolves dug under pig sties and broke into cow sheds through the roofs. At this time the Krasnoyarsk region seemed to be a land unfit for human habitation. Rather it was a planet of wolves. Rural streets were deserted while wolves howled just beyond the village confines.

In 2004 there were countless stories about attacks committed by wolves, and the number of wolf attacks in Balakhta villages had increased dramatically. Packs of wolves totaling more than 400 had the run of the taiga.

Today in 2005 there are few professional wolf hunters, and the secrets of wolf hunting have been lost. ■

Wolf Hunting with Eagles from Wolves in Russia

Hunting with eagles and falcons in Kazakhstan and parts of Mongolia dates back to 2000 BCE. This is the only region in the world with such a long and unbroken tra-

dition of this type of hunting. This heritage is threatened now as presently the number of berkuchi (eagle hunters) has dwindled to just a few old men. The eagle hunter will walk, or if on horseback will trot over the Kazakh Steppe with his right arm resting on a wooden fork called a *baldak*, which is



© TOM STACK/TOM STACK & ASSOCIATES

attached to his saddle. Perched on his right hand will be a trained eagle, some of them weighing five kilograms. If the hunter spots any prey, he removes a tooled leather hood or *tomaga*, which covers the eagle's eyes. The bird immediately spots the prey, which in older days could have been a wolf or perhaps a fox. An eagle may have a wingspan of almost two meters and can dive at around 100 kilometers per hour. The eagle lands upon its prey and seizes the animal in

its huge claws and holds the prey until the hunter arrives.

It takes patient preparation for an eagle hunter to capture and train an eagle or falcon. A young eagle may be taken from a nest and trained, but the preferred method is to capture a wild bird, which already knows how to hunt. The training takes months, but once the relationship is established between the eagle and his master, real hunting can begin. The eagle's eyesight is

said to be eight times better than a human's. If the hunter sends his eagle after a wolf, the hunter must be close by, as a wolf can kill or wound an eagle if the eagle does not immediately grab the wolf in the neck or head area. The golden eagle is the symbol of an independent Kazakhstan and it's on the

national flag as well as on the tails of the jet airplanes of Kazakhstan Airlines.

This ancient type of hunting with eagles is still widespread in Kazakhstan. The hunters are called *kusbegy*. Most of the hunting is for foxes, but saiga, roe deer, and rabbits are also hunted, and sometimes a hunter will send his eagle, if it is a large one, to attack a wolf. The eagles spot the wolves, and then the hunters close in on them from horseback. ■