

THE RESTORATION OF WOLVES IN FRANCE: STORY, CONFLICTS AND USES OF RUMOR

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*Introduction*¹

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the return of wolves in France has caused passionate controversies in which nature protectors oppose mountain sheep-farmers' position on wolves. If one wants to understand these debates, it is necessary to go beyond the stereotyped slogans and pay attention to the social discourse expressed through the detour of rumors. In this chapter, I show how the situation evolved from spring 1993, the first announcement of the "official" return of wolves in France, through the end of 2003. I then describe and assess the parties involved: mountain sheep-farmers; nature protectors' associations (NPAs) which include "ecologists," friends of the wolves and wild fauna defenders; and government administrations managing subsidies to mountain sheep-farmers or in charge of wildlife. Each party has tried to influence public opinion and has asserted to be the closest to "Nature," a blanket term that covers very different ideas. I will present the main arguments in the conflict and I will then present and analyze rumors about wild animals and the truths they express. Animal-release rumors that exist all over the planet correspond to the indirect expression of fears of the irruption of the wild amongst us. I will conclude with remarks on the probable future of wild wolves and predators in France.

While other predators did exist, for example bears, lynxes and wildcats, wolves have traditionally carried the strongest and most negative image in European societies, not only in folktales and legends but also in naturalists' descriptions since classical antiquity. In such stories, wolves regularly attacked livestock, especially sheep, occasionally humans, and especially children acting as shepherds. Numerous and recurrent episodes of rabies-infected wolves killing scores of humans from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries and the dramatic case of the Gévaudan Beast in 1764–1767² helped to turn wolves into a feared scourge of humans in France. Such stories

supported heavy-handed anti-wolf measures: specialized wolf hunters, bounties, and systematic poisoning, all leading to the wolf's disappearance from France in the 1920s.

But the wolf held a major place in French popular culture and wolves, treated as quasi humans by popular culture, have come today to resemble pets, objects of emotional links and of individuation. Friends of the wolves, often passionate, have launched a major rehabilitation campaign of the animal, asserting that wolves have never killed any human – except wolves suffering from rabies, and maybe not even then. That campaign has involved a complete rewriting of the story of the Gévaudan Beast. Public opinion about wolves has changed completely, which is not minor, for this change overhauls our symbolic bestiary.

Research Methods

From autumn 1999 until the end of 2002, the assessment of conflicts sparked by the return of wild wolves in France – and especially of how seemingly unrelated “rumors” were relevant to understand these conflicts – was one of my main research subjects. However, during that period, I also co-authored a book on today's rumors (Campion-Vincent and Renard 2002) and published four research articles.

My research methods were indirect: interviews of key actors such as the author of the most recent report on the subject (interview with Pierre Bracque, Oct 10, 1999); the former director of the Environment Department's key agency in 1992–1993, when the wolves' return was noticed and announced who is also a member of the board of the main Nature Protectors' Associations (NPAs) lobbying for wolves (interview with Gilbert Simon, Dec 29, 1999); one of the main representatives of the sheep farmers, a sheep farmer himself (interview with Denis Grosjean, Nov 26, 1999).

In the bibliographical approach, my aim was to privilege the “internal” documents aimed at specialists and peers, more revealing for my purpose than the document addressing the general public, which are “tailored” for outsiders. I thus became an avid reader of administrative circulars and instructions, mostly of those available on the Internet, but also of the 1998 report authored by the Agricultural Chamber of the Alpes Maritimes county³ asserting that the reintroduction of wolves had been deliberate and covered by secretive and

lying authorities. I also studied systematically the NPAs' newsletters, media of internal information aimed at members of a small "community" which express their shared values: thirty-five issues for the main NPA (*Groupe Loup France* [France wolf group], which has become *FERUS* [latin term for predators]) and sixteen issues for the second (*Mission loup de France Nature Environnement* [Wolf mission of France nature environment]) were thoroughly analyzed to obtain an understanding of each group's worldview and culture. The fourteen issues of the Environment Department's official newsletter were studied too. This bibliographic endeavor extended to many of the numerous books published on the subject of wolves and nature magazines as well.

I lectured in the regional park of Luberon (Apt, Dec 2, 1999) and in several research conferences in 2000 and 2003. I also observed a meeting of the main pro-wolf association (Paris, Dec 18, 1999) and lately participated in an official conference convened by the Environment Department (Lyons, Dec 9–10, 2003). The feedback from these contacts was important as it enlivened the dusty words gathered.

When I reached the time of writing, the mobilization and rediscovery of the experience and ideas from my former fieldwork on the close subjects of animal-release stories – such as viper-release stories (Campion-Vincent 1990a), animal-release stories in general (Campion-Vincent 1990b) or mystery cats (Campion-Vincent 1992) – and of the problems raised by the return of lynxes (Campion-Vincent 1996b) were capital. Writing came in successive steps: the oral presentations of 1999 and 2000, a first research article, a second article inserted in a special issue on wolves which I co-edited (Campion-Vincent 2002) and now this contribution. The authorities' approach to the problems raised by the presence of wild wolves for the mountain sheep-farmers greatly evolved during the period of my research and a new set of interviews was conducted in 2002 and 2003 to cover this evolution.

The Return of Wolves in France

In the early 1990s wild populations of wolves reappeared on the French territory from which they had disappeared in the late 1920s. Since first reappearing on the French landscape wolves have spread throughout the country. In February of 2004, the *Office National de*

la Chasse et de la Faune Sauvage [the national agency of hunting and wild fauna, ONCFS] estimated that “fifty five to seventy” wolves were present on the French territory in 2003 (Briet 2004). Their presence has been the subject of intense debate among parties with a stake in their return, a debate revealing different constructions of Nature.

The Events of the Wolf's Return

Wild wolves made their French debut with sightings in the national park of Mercantour on the border of Italy as early as 1990 (Bracque 1999:56) but with no official confirmation. Observations conducted during the winter of 1992–1993 confirmed the presence of a pack. With support from the Environment Department, their return was announced in a May 1993 special issue of the nature lovers' magazine *Terre Sauvage* [Wild Land] titled “Welcome to the wolf, now back in France.” The special issue included fourteen pages in which pictures of wolves were dominant (mixing as is usual close-ups of frolicking wolves taken in captivity and traces of footprints in snow). The two authors were members of NPAs, and one of them, Geneviève Carbone, was then employed by the national park of Mercantour as an ethnozoologist. A lyrical editorial advised its readers to see in these “pioneers of animal reconquest [. . .] fragments of Celtic soul howling their freedom in the mountain” (Paccalet 1993:19).

The return of wolves was generally supported by the French public: the Environment Department sponsored a public opinion poll in May 1995 to assess support and found that seventy-nine percent judged that the return of wolves was good news (Dobremez 1996:84). Yet wolves were not well-received by mountain sheep-farmers due to concern over damage to flocks; their interests were supported by the Agriculture Department. In 1999, a committee of the National Assembly, pushed by political representatives of mountain sheep-farmers, published a report that concluded “wolves must be excluded from pastoralism⁴ areas,” while their presence “could be tolerated in ‘wolves park’ areas” (Chevallier 1999:31).

Slow to respond, the Environment⁵ and Agriculture⁶ Departments of the French government implemented measures in March 2000 to control wolves, designating areas where the wolves were totally protected (the national park of Mercantour and the natural regional park of Queyras, as well as “a traffic corridor linking the two parks”)

and areas in which “the population of wolves is controlled” (the rest of the Alps). And in July 2000 an additional protocol allowed decisions of capture or destruction of wolves to be made by the prefects on the local level. This “Wolf Plan” clearly took into account the clout of the political representatives of the mountain areas. A May 2003 report, commissioned by the French National Assembly, titled “Predators and mountain pastoralism. Priority to Man”, suggested extending predator control to additional species, including bears and lynxes and called to dialogue of the Paris authorities with the local elites (Spagnou 2003a). A National Wolf Committee was set up in November 2003 and gave the major wolf management role to the Agriculture Department, “for all that concerns the help to pastoralism confronting the predation of wolves (prevention, better working conditions, etc.)” while the Environment Department’s task was “to finance damage compensation, and to define a management plan of the species in France” (Programme Life 2003).

The Parties and Their Arguments

The discourse surrounding the wolf’s reintroduction in France revolves around two issues: damage to flocks and the mode of the wolf’s return. The reintroduction of wolves to the French landscape, however, may be best understood in the context of constructions of the landscape and humans’ relationship to it.

Mountain sheep-farmers in the French Alps graze some 860,000 sheep over 8,660,000 square kilometers (Bracque 1999; Spagnou 2003a). Their incomes, subsidies included, are among the lowest of French farming even as their allowances and subsidies are twice the incomes mountain sheep-farmers derive from the sale of sheep. Mountain sheep-farmers, with support from the very large Agriculture Department, have shown strong antipathy toward wolves, basing their extreme dislike on figures showing loss of sheep to wolves. From 1993 to 2000, mountain sheep-farmers received 1 million euros in compensation for 5,760 sheep killed or maimed in the Alps. They received 301,595 euros as compensation for 1,828 animals lost in 2001 and 417,184 euros for 2,304 animals lost in 2002.⁷ From 1993 to 2000, seventy-one percent of animal compensation (and sixty-four percent from 1993 to 2002) were from the Alpes Maritimes county, where the national park of Mercantour is located. Damage has spread in recent years: the more northern county of Isère, where only 182

animals were killed until 2000, had heavy predatory damage in 2001 (474) and 2002 (551) (Spagnou 2003a:153–154).

The wolf's return to France, by contrast, was lauded by the NPAs and the Environment Department. NPAs consider themselves auxiliary scientists who help the Environment Department and the prestigious natural sciences institution, *Museum national d'histoire naturelle*, to plan the management of natural areas and carry out the conservation of biodiversity. The NPAs have been keen to put in context the damage to flocks, asserting that stray dog attacks are far more numerous, aggressive, and damaging, even describing them as “murderers” (Minga 1993:20). Soon after the wolves arrived in Mercantour, this claim appeared in a magazine article:

Nowadays dogs tarnish the animals' [wolves] image. More precisely stray dogs, more than 50,000 in France, who kill game, poultry and livestock while only wolves are accused. In six months there have been in Mercantour 60 attacks of dogs versus 33 of wolves (*Télé-loisirs* 1995:8, as quoted in Bobbé 1998:280–1).

NPAs put forward extravagant figures about the evils of stray dogs. In the 1980s wolf advocate Gérard Ménatory (author of several books on wolves since the mid 1970s and later director of the Wolf Park of Gévaudan) routinely mentioned the figure of 50,000 sheep killed each year by dogs, without any documentation of his assertions. A booklet on how to manage guard dogs gives the highest figure, juxtaposing the limited damage caused by “wild animals” against the huge damage ascribed to “domestic dogs”:

Each year in France, domestic dogs cause the death of 500,000 sheep in a flock or some ten millions. The damage is important. Predation caused by wild animals (lynx, wolf and bear) is less than 1,000 sheep. Predation by domestic dogs concerns the whole territory. Predation by wild animals is limited to specific areas. It is therefore mostly to protect themselves against the attacks of domestic dogs that French sheepfarmers have reintroduced guard dogs in their flocks (Wick 2002:8).

The general secretary of the National Ovine Federation, Denis Grosjean (1998), responded to these assertions:

Do not tell us that we accept from stray dogs what we reject from protected predators. Whether pest or cholera, we fight relentlessly all that slaughters our flocks. [. . .] Nothing is common between the sad toll of stray dogs, that intervene on the whole territory [. . .] and that of hyper protected beasts, slaughtering and stressing always the same flocks, with the encouragement of the public authorities.

Grosjean went on to cast sheep farmers as the true “managers of areas where they work” and articulated an anthropocentric view: “To protect nature, perfect! But not to the detriment of sheep-farmers, not to the detriment of their work, not against those that maintain the balance between pasture and forest” (Grosjean 1998). Indeed, there is no room for wolves in the livestock farming areas. The city dwellers who appreciate them so much, according to Grosjean, should take over their burden:

If France wishes to experience beasts in the wild, let us start with the *Bois de Boulogne* and the *Bois de Vincennes*, with the forests of Fontainebleau and Rambouillet,⁸ where it will not be our sheep’s legs that will be at risk (Grosjean 1998).

Faced with the mounting protests of sheep-farmers, the NPAs endlessly repeat that the existence of wild wolves in the mountain areas is an enrichment of France’s natural heritage. While they admit that conflicts between mountain sheep-farmers and wolves are inevitable, they assert that protection measures offered to the sheep-farmers (dogs, enclosures, assistants) are certainly enough to contain predators, and that national solidarity must be called upon to bolster compensations. NPAs firmly oppose any regulation (authorizing removal by capture or destruction) of the wolf population until the wild population reaches sustainable levels (as many as one hundred in about twenty wolf packs).⁹

The second point of contention for wolf opponents is over how wolves were reintroduced to France. A 1998 report, titled “A so-called natural return of wolves in France,” of the Agricultural Chamber of the Alpes-Maritimes county, drew from an Italian inquiry its conclusion: that the reintroduction in France had been deliberate.¹⁰ This conclusion, the report posited, legitimized the removal of wolves from the French territory. These accusations were not, however, included in the Spagnou Report (2003a), one of the two parliamentary reports, because, the authors concluded, the data was uncertain. Furthermore, except if the unrealistic thesis of a huge conspiracy was adopted, it was only isolated wolf enthusiasts that could have carried out these hypothetical reintroductions:

The question of the natural return or of the reintroduction of the wolf in France has drawn the commission’s attention. [. . .] Your reporter’s conviction is that truth lies probably between the two: according to scientific knowledge now available, a natural return of the wolf from

Italy is quite possible [...] but cannot be proven. It is also probable that clandestine releases of wolves have taken place but, once again, without the possibility of proving this. Anyhow these releases have probably not been the object of a conspiracy implicating the national park of Mercantour and the Nature Protection Agency of the Environment Department. Irresponsible individuals passionate of nature have probably enacted these releases. If there had been a conspiracy, it would mean that more than half of the persons heard on the subject would deliberately have lied to the commission while they deposited under oath (Spagnou 2003a:25–26).

The Meaning of Nature

Mountain sheep-farmers and NPAs declare the same aim: to maintain and enrich natural territories and milieus. However, it is clear that the words “nature” and “territories” do not correspond to the same realities for each group. Nature as work tool or Nature as ecosystem are two wildly different approaches to the concept.

In the early 1990s, conducting fieldwork in the Vosges, where reintroduction of lynxes had been implemented by the Environment Department, sociologist Anne Vourc’h (1991) analyzed the tensions caused by the reintroduction in open spaces of a predator whose disappearance had been deliberate. The naturalists promoting the reintroductions and the locals who lived and worked in these open spaces perceived the landscape differently. The naturalists saw themselves as protectors and managers of ecosystems and biological spaces, spaces to be managed for public good by the restoration and maintenance of a biological diversity that included the predator, seen as necessary for the maintenance of a natural balance. The locals, farmers, and hunters talked of the land as work tool and cast predators’ return as a threat to their traditional role as inhabitants and managers of their own living and working space.

Vourc’h concluded by asking a provocative question: Can the reintroductions of protected species be considered as the creation of a new kind of zoo, “third type zoos”? After the early cages of classic zoos and the enlarged spaces of animal parks, the first two types, it is now rural areas that enclose the protected species, areas that are controlled by scientific follow-up, while productive human activities no longer master them.

At the end of the 1990s, in the debate raised by the return of wolves, the same differences in space perception could be observed. The mountain sheep-farmers present themselves as managers of areas

which, but for their arduous labor and the flocks' grazing, would only be impenetrable and monotonous bush. Denis Grosjean (1998) illustrated this in his Lyons speech:

Sheep-farmers do not maim the landscapes. Armed with our flocks, we stop the thick bramble, crush dead wood, and aerate the under-wood. [. . .] Beneficial to nature, our activities, grazing, transhumance and mowing, maintain and develop a rich flora. As to fauna, scientists and hunters agree that the multiplicity of species and the abundance of animals are closely linked to sheep-farming. Sheep, this ill-appreciated livestock, is the ultimate detail before losing the fight to bush and firs.

The activist-ecologist invokes images of a land unpolluted by human presence, the lost paradise of an untouched and varied nature that can, however, be rebuilt. Thus a regular columnist of *Terre Sauvage* argued:

We will never see again the virgin splendor of the forest before Vercingetorix.¹¹ At least we can try to safeguard some shreds of it; or to reinvent it. I would like fragments of France – let us say 1,000 square kilometers per Dept – where the powerful National Forest Agency lets trees grow as they please; where hunters allow deer, boars, martens and eagle owls to sort out their business; where we reintroduce lammergeyers and large grouse, beavers and European buffaloes, aurochs “reconstituted” through genetic engineering, brown bears and lynxes. Not to forget wolves (Paccalet 1993:19).

Integrating the Realities Expressed through Animal-Release Rumors

Amongst social reactions to the return of wild animals, some are judged uninteresting and not worth serious consideration by the authorities: these reactions are labeled *rumors*, i.e., untrue assertions. Yet, the study of these rumors, if conducted would have led to predictions and interpretations of unexpected social reactions. These rumors' central theme is animal-release, accidental or deliberate but covert, mostly of negatively perceived species (Campion-Vincent 1990a, 1990b, 1992, 1996b; Champion-Vincent and Renard 1992).

The social sciences take rumors seriously since the pioneering studies of Allport and Postman (1947) and Shibutani (1966). These first studies centered on rumors in the exceptional circumstances of riots or war; they tended to consider rumors as erroneous and pathological. The later studies of Rosnow and Fine (1976), Fine (1992) and

Fine and Turner (2001) adopted a more analytical approach and integrated the approaches of sociology and folklore (defined as a form of informal culture differing from popular culture because it is not marketed and from elite culture because it is not taught in schools). Rumors, often told in a short sentence, can be narrated and developed into stories; they then become contemporary (or urban) legends. Rumors and contemporary legends are truth claims that involve unsecured, unverified information; they are shared and transmitted because judged plausible. The common ideas about rumors, presenting them as always false and maliciously created, seem to validate their dismissal. But rumors can be accurate and “some rumors may be factually incorrect [. . .] yet reveal fundamental truths about the nature of the cultural order” (Fine and Turner 2001:56). Recurrent rumors of animal-release are meaningful and deserve interpretation. My hypothesis is that they indicate that the reintroductions of predators were not fully accepted.

Alligators in the Sewers

One of the most famous contemporary legends that appeared in the 1960s, the rumor of the alligators which are supposed to haunt the New York sewers (and sometimes bite the users of public toilets), is an animal-release story. Brought back from Florida by careless tourists to entertain the kids, the baby alligators have been flushed down the toilets into the sewers when they grow up into cumbersome large alligators. Many authentic facts correspond to this story, for example baby alligators were sold to tourists in Florida already in the 1930s. The rumor’s widespread circulation – tales of alligators in the sewers are told in most big cities of the planet – is mostly linked, however, to the tale’s symbolic value (Campion-Vincent 1996a). This tale is a metaphor of the impossibility of taming wild nature completely; it focuses “on the violation of a boundary between wild and civilized domains” (Oring 1996:330). It also comments upon the inhumanity of the great modern anonymous metropolis, the urban jungle encompassing all dangers.

Viper-Release Stories

Appearing in 1976, viper-release stories remained very active in France until 1985. They then stabilized into a belief, still alluded to

in some social groups, to the “fact” that numerous vipers are or have been intentionally released. Their appearance is linked to measures protecting animal species adopted in 1979, which included reptiles.¹² In 1962, protective measures had already been adopted for negatively perceived birds of prey, such as buzzards and vultures. The expression “protected animal” shocks the public when applied to species such as buzzards and vipers.

These stories contain irrational elements, especially the popular assertions that vipers have been released through helicopters by groups hoping to covertly reintroduce them to the landscape. This fantasy element renders implausible the conspiracy interpretations asserting that these stories were constructed by hunters to denigrate friends of nature: one does not imagine propagandists using the fantasy element of helicopters in a concerted action of disinformation. The frequent usage of helicopters in rural and mountainous areas is not a more convincing explanation: “confusions” can only emerge if there are pre-existing “convictions.” Yet the fantasy element of the helicopters is central to the story, as it unites opposed dimensions, one of the functions of symbolic thought.

Although its anonymous creators and disseminators are not conscious of it, the viper-release story echoes ancient legendary themes. For instance, the mysterious showers of lizards, snakes, salamanders, crabs, shrimps, prawns and snails, rains of frogs and fishes, of all types of slimy and negative creatures raining down from the sky, that are attested as dire omens in the ancient chronicles and still sporadically appear today (Mitchell and Rickard 1982:72–81, 89–96). These stories also echo the traditional tales about the death of the young nest robber, bit by a viper coiled in the nest he came to rob; in these tales the land-locked snake appears as close to the aerial birds.¹³ It is equally possible to think of a link of contiguity between the rotating propeller blades of the helicopter and the undulating coils of the snake.¹⁴

This story is a collective symbolic production that permits the expression of half-formulated thoughts that circulate about practices of protection and reintroduction of tabooed species that are considered simultaneously positive and dangerous. It is also an accusatory tale, which declares that nature – including animal species dangerous for humans – is given priority over humans by ecologists. The viper-release story is the voice of those whose actions on nature are

judged illegitimate, of these “backwards” strata of society that authorities ignore when they make decisions (protecting buzzards and vipers) inspired by the powerful orthodoxy of science.

Mystery Cats

In many animal-release accusations the sighting¹⁵ of a “Beast” is interpreted as indirect proof of the presence of a roaming feline, of a big exotic cat: puma, panther or lion. These cases are sometimes “closed” by the discovery of the authors of damage, stray dogs or a circus escapee. The pattern is not new. A Swiss Jura case in 1895 ended with the discovery of stray dogs (*Almanach Vermot* 1895). In Burgundy, a similar case in 1907 ended with the discovery of the remains of a hyena escaped from a travelling circus (*L’Yonne Républicaine* 2003). However, almost all Mystery Cat cases remain unsolved, “open” and mysterious. When official experts are called, they invariably conclude that the anomaly can be explained by the presence of a stray domestic animal (usually a dog) and by over-exaggerated fears of the public. But the concerned public energetically rejects these conclusions, maintains the thesis of a wild animal, or often asserts that it is a captive animal, voluntarily released to harm.

These Mystery Cat cases are minor events, of opinion and interpretation rather than of material facts. However they have persisted some forty years in France. The media strongly participate in the elaboration of these “flaps” or cycles of agitation around anomalies, often treating them as entertainment.

In France, twenty cases of Mystery Cats appearances reached the press from 1978 until 1989 (Campion-Vincent 2002:44), twenty from 1991 until 2000 (Campion-Vincent 2002:45) (Brodu and Meurger 1984; Brodu 1999).

The Mystery Cats phenomenon exists all over the world and curiously started in Great Britain (a country which possesses no big wild animals roaming free) in the 1960s when the Surrey Puma became a national celebrity (Goss 1992). The designation “Alien Big Cats” (ABC), used by the British to designate these cases, underlines the strangeness of the cat, as “alien,” designating the foreigner but also the extraterrestrial being. ABC maps have become a routine feature of the British media as maps of the sightings are published each year. The website of the British Big Cats Society claims that there were 438 sightings of strange beasts, mostly black, in 2001 (www.british-

bigcats.org). Famous cases – including Surrey Puma (1962–1966), Black Beast of Exmoor (1994–1995), and Beast of Essex (1998) – have caused large-scale hunts and official enquiries that found either nothing or domestic animals. Folklorist John Widdowson (2003:20–21) has offered an interpretation:

Could they [Big Cats] be regarded as manifestations of what is the same enduring English rural myth: that out there somewhere lies whatever it is that we fear. [. . .] Often believed to be real, various kinds of big cats have silently taken over some of the habitats formerly haunted by Black Dogs [traditional phantom dogs] and their like.

The U.S. variants are briefly discussed in Brunvand (2001). The context is very different, as wild protected cougars *do* exist in several regions. However, the U.S. variants mention “panthers” and “lions.” In “Big Cats Running Wild,” Brunvand (2001:34–5) notices several successive panther sightings in Michigan (1984, 1985, 1989, 1992, 1995) and lion sightings near Philadelphia in 1995, all of which were investigated without results.

Mystery Cats cases correspond to a keen interest in the intrusions of the wild amongst us. They reuse and reinterpret traditional elements (Meurger 1990, 1994) and often voice accusations of animal-release.

Metaphoric thought functions in several different contexts and assertions of animal-release (several other species than vipers or big cats are concerned, especially lynxes, bears and wolves) exist all over the world: in Italy as in the United States¹⁶ wildlife managers are accused of releasing numerous species.

Wolf-Release Stories

In the case of wolves, whose former image was very poor in several circles, the protests about their return were often expressed openly. Rumors concerned mostly their introduction, said to have been covert and deliberate.

1. Italy and Sweden

The helicopter – or, in the following case, an airplane – regularly appears in accusations accompanying, in Italy, the expansion of wolves from the Abruzzes. In a cartoon playfully entitled *The throw of the wolves, or the favorite sport of the true conservationist*, planes with the inscription *Parco d'Abruzzo* on their sides throw parachute-equipped

“Siberian wolves.” The wolves are shown dreaming of abundant sheep prey as they drift down to the Italian countryside.

A perplexed Italian zoologist (Marsan 1994:56) referred to “a sort of collective psychodrama” for such introduction tales. He emphasized that these tales do not respect biological knowledge of wolves:

The tales of hunters, and generally those coming from rural areas describe a sort of collective psychodrama that sees hordes of wolves, parachuted from helicopters or at least fed through parachute drops, that are observed at any time of day or night and also are not shy of humans (Marsan 1994:56).

In a letter to the director of the national park of Mercantour, biologist Luigi Boitani pointed out that these recurring accusations ignore wolves’ dynamic behavior:

It is useful to recall how, even in Italy, each time that shepherds or sheep-farmers want to oppose wolves, they accuse the government, regional authorities, forest administrators, the WorldWide Fund for Nature and lots of other bodies to have reintroduced it, voluntarily ignoring the obvious dynamics of this species in Italy and its ability of dispersion (Dobremez 1996:162).

In Sweden, where wolves had almost disappeared from the south and center of the country in the 1870s, bounties for their shooting were maintained until the mid 1960s. In 1971, a protection project was started when only a few animals remained in the north. As in other countries, methods of development of the wolf stocks that were then discussed included the possibility to breed wolves in captivity and release them.¹⁷ Swedish folklorist Per Peterson (1995:359) has discussed rumors circulating in Sweden in 1985. These asserted that wolves were:

Let out in the forest by order of the Swedish Society of Nature Protection. [...] Similar motifs that have been attracted to rumours and legends [were noted that] deal with finds of empty wolf-cages in the forests or earmarks from zoological gardens on dead wolves or the presence of placed out meat in the forests. The latter should proceed from authorities, which provide wolves with flesh as they lack hunting training.

But Peterson does not conclude that the stories originated in the discovery of these provisions in international conventions. Discussing the problems wolves really raised in traditional agrarian Swedish society where resources were severely limited, he remarks that the

fear of wolves had a real economic base then, as the loss of livestock could be seriously damaging to a farm. It was mostly as killers of livestock that wolves were feared. Then wolves and their behavior were well known, which is not the case today. Today's folklore is not about wolves, but about their defenders who are presented as the real danger (Peterson 1995:362).

2. France

The return of the wolves in France in 1992 did not surprise the NPAs that waited for it eagerly and impatiently. A previous study I conducted (Campion-Vincent 1992) identified this expectation. In the 1980s activist media celebrities seized every occasion to proclaim the reintroduction of wolves, and books published by radicals or articles in the newspapers asserted that wolves were secretly released. Numerous inhabitants of the Lozère county believed that wolves were reintroduced (already or soon) into the Margeride mountains. Local projects of reintroduction did exist and were sustained by the Tourism Office – the Wolf Park of Gévaudan was already a major tourist attraction – while professional agricultural bodies of course rejected them. The ambiguity that existed then around wolves was marked by the repeated jocular April fool's announcements of escapes or official reintroduction of wolves. At the conference upon animal reintroductions convened by the Environment Department's Protection of Nature Agency and the Cévennes National Park in December 1988, biologist François de Beaufort presented a proposal of wolf's reintroduction, suggesting the release of a wolf pack in the Chambord park estate (Beaufort 1990).

Social anthropologist Pierre Laurence has discussed the reasons the inhabitants of Cévennes National Park have to believe the national park authorities reintroduce predators, or are about to do it. The national park authorities' activities concerning wildlife protection, especially the help brought by the Cévennes National Park to the reintroduction operations of vultures and large grouse, are well known. The expressions "wolf park"¹⁸ and "national park" are close, and even though no wolves have been seen in the Cévennes, rumors are recurrent; so much so that official denials have been published in the local press by the Cévennes authorities (*Lien des chercheurs cévenols* 1997; *La Lozère nouvelle* 1999).

From 1945 until 1989 in France, there were thirty-nine wolf sightings, of wild or captive origin: twenty-nine ending with the animal's

capture or death, ten remaining mysterious but where the presence of a wolf was affirmed (Campion-Vincent 2002:30). Since 1989, there have been ten cases of sightings of wolves, eight ending with the capture or death of the animal, and two remaining mysterious (Campion-Vincent 2002:31).

The Spagnou Report, compiled from November 2002 to May 2003, published all its hearings (2003b: 863 pages, taken verbatim) which are a real information mine of attitudes towards wolves. The layman and the biologist thus successively describe the incident of a wolf sighting that occurred early in December of 2002.

The incident occurred in an isolated village of the regional park of Queyras, Ristolas (Altitude 1,600 meters, one hundred inhabitants) situated by the Italian frontier at the end of the Guil valley, in the Hautes Alpes county. Joel Giraud, the local political representative and member of the investigative committee, described it:

A week ago, the inhabitants of Ristolas have seen six wolves cross the village in a single file [à la queue leu leu] by the day's fall. A legitimate worry has been generated (Spagnou 2003b, 1:90).

However two weeks later, the ONCFS biologist, Christophe Duchamp, who investigated the incident, stressed the wolves were not that close and expressed frustration that *he* never saw wolves:

One must sort the data and the differences of interpretation of testimonies. [. . .] I have been there a week later, and the Mayor certified that they had been on the village square, that the wolves had entered the village, that they would end eating children and little girls . . . In fact it had snowed and we checked the wolves' passage. The tracks are really by the village, so people can have seen them from the village's last house, where they were no farther than a hundred meters away I admit, but the wolf has not crossed the village square! [. . .] Personally I've been studying the wolf for four years and I've only spotted it once, in the South-East of Poland. I've been out in the field for a whole year every day from 5 a.m. till 8 p.m. and I've only spotted it once (Spagnou 2003b, 1:154).

From this exchange, the reader can understand that the two approaches cannot be reconciled: the layman fears (and romanticizes) while the biologist stresses precision (and yet oddly seems disappointed that he has not seen the animal he tracks).

Cases of "erratic wolves" colonizing new Alpine valleys since 1993 often begin as mysterious "Beast" cases. Indeed, soon biological analyses (of feces and hair) confirm the predator's nature: it's a wolf, and

it has the Italian wolves' genetic type. Yet not all accept the interpretation of these analyses suggested by the authorities and science: that is, that this wolf is a wild animal that has traveled "naturally" from its abode in the Abruzzes. They are inclined to think it's a released or escaped animal of captive origin.

Analysis

Through many cultural channels – the genres of conversation and of oral narrative, but also the productions of popular culture and of children's literature, by the means of "ostension"¹⁹ or of performance and the elaborations of official culture: major literature and scientific knowledge – we build around wild animals, and especially around animals that stir negative emotions, collective symbolic creations that delimitate human society (Gillepsie and Mechling 1987). Although the dominant mode of thought rejects them, one can note the persistence of the negative use of animals in propaganda and publicity. Activists, who often do not reflect on the psychological and logical roots of these phobias, frequently and ritually denounce this persistence as "medieval superstitions." Wild in the sense of outlawed may have disappeared from the socially tolerated discourse, but in the jungle of modern cities, metaphors of wildness and uncontrolled animality (of which wolves remain the emblem) are always used to brand rebellious or delinquent youths.

Wild animals have been the pretext for a metaphoric and analogous discourse on human society. Scientists and ecologists reject this comparative mode of thought, and this rejection creates uneasiness in the general public that remains attached to ancient motifs, metaphors, associations, cultural symbols, and emblems. In this comparative approach the existence of negatively perceived and tabooed animal species is a logical necessity. If to talk about animals is to talk about humans, one must be able to express evil as well as good. To remark that negative animals are "good to think",²⁰ "that is they connect to a powerful cultural logic that makes sense to narrators and audiences" (Fine and Turner 2001:63), is not to defend cruel practices towards some animal categories.

For local human populations that have to cope with the disturbances caused by wolves' presence, the return of wolves corresponds to the intrusion of city dwellers in their narrowing universe. They feel these city dwellers dictate the rules of management of their environment

and that they almost live in “third type zoos” organized by naturalists (Vourc’h 1991).

Pierre Laurence (2002:193–194) has perceptively analyzed the fears the local human populations of Cévennes feel and express about the return of predators, for them the sign of the loss of human population and of the progressive “wilding” of the mountain:

The Cévennes inhabitants long had to share their territory with the dangerous wolves and little by little our ancestors were able to get rid of this predator in an era when the whole territory was “humanized”; then the losses of the First World War marked a first phase of loss of territory and of return of the wild with the arrival of boars; this was provisional as for a long time hunting contained the animal; today the boars pullulate, in a territory returned to the wild because of a lack of men and money to maintain it. In this perspective, the possibility of a return of the wolves with the protection of a national park that was set up to protect wild fauna – and their respective perceptions of “wild” are very different – would mean for many inhabitants the de-humanization and definitive “wilding” of their home country. The rumor of a possible wolves’ reintroduction, following similar reintroductions, can be interpreted as “the end of Cévennes” those Cévennes that men had patiently managed and brought to “culture” in the word’s two meanings.

The resistances, expressed through rumors and contradictory reactions, to the return of wild animals highlight the limits that actions inspired by an ideology meet when they bring important changes into local ways of life. It is well known that local resistances to change have experienced an exponential growth over the past thirty years, multiplying conflicts linked to management operations and making very cumbersome the realization of any new equipment, electric utility, train or dam for example: it is the famous “NIMBY [Not In My Back Yard] syndrome,” a standard term in environmental literature regarding the treatment of hazardous waste.

The stakes of the manipulations of wild fauna, which possess their legitimacy, would be clearer if there was less invocation of sacred principles, less conjuring up of the loaded term of “Nature.” Manipulations of wild fauna are still often legitimized by a myth of restoration, of reconstruction. This myth lessens or denies the artificial management traits (radio-collars to ensure follow-up, feeding areas for vultures) that inevitably accompany manipulations of wild fauna. The very term of “reintroduction,” whose use is general, sends back “to this conception that Nature would have been complete in some

past era and that, therefore, one can only reconstruct it" (Micoud 1993:207). The search of "property rights" given to an animal on a territory by its past is, of course, more successful when the animal is very present in the symbolic bestiary; this is why the wolf's return in France was so meaningful to friends of nature.

Can we recognize that manipulations are necessary to modify Nature? Can we dream of the recovery of paradise lost but also understand that the environment must be managed with care? Nature, yes, but nature shaped and organized by humans, whether to cultivate it or to re-establish animal species that had previously been removed.

Conclusion: What Will Happen?

The questions asked by ecologists are legitimate, and most reasonable people subscribe to the ideal of a diversified environment and accept that active conservation is necessary to maintain biodiversity. However, this ideal must be implemented through democratic means, not by the pressure groups of "deep ecology" as insists philosopher Luc Ferry (1992:237–238):

Deep ecology raises antipathy amongst democrats. Nevertheless it challenges the humanist ethic it claims to transcend [...] Deep ecology asks true questions, which a critical discourse denouncing its fascist or of ultra-leftist aspects cannot disqualify. Public opinion will never believe that ecology, however radical it may be, is more dangerous than the scores of Chernobyl threatening us. [...] It is because ecology is serious business, that it should not be the monopoly of deep ecologists. [...] Questioning the liberal logic of production and consumption cannot leave us indifferent. [...] We do understand that mankind is not on earth to buy ever more sophisticated cars and TV sets.

It seems improbable that the controlled regulation measures adopted in 2000 or the management plan of 2004 might bring the disappearance of wild wolves in France. Such measures, adopted eleven years ago for lynxes, have not stopped the progression of that species. The quasi-disappearance of humans from the rural spaces will probably free up areas for the predator.

However, adding to the prevalence of their contrasted image, the pack organization of wolves renders their presence difficult to tolerate in sheep-farming areas. Conflicts will probably continue, but in 2004, the necessity of compromise is admitted by most of the actors.

The information policy of the Environment Department became more open after the adoption of the Wolf Plan. The bulletin *L'Infoloup* [Wolves Info] and the online site of the Programme Life (www.paca.environment.gouv.fr), published a few articles emanating from sheep-farmers.

The attitudes of the local agents – of the County Agriculture and Forest Agencies of the Agriculture Department and also of some of the personnel hired by the Environment Department to manage the consequences of the reappearance of predators – have been important in the adoption of this spirit of compromise. In the meetings of the Summer 2003 aiming to organize the future, these county agents of the Agriculture Department pleaded for a choice of official terms closer to the sheep-farmer's sensitivities (“regulation” was suggested by them, but the NPAs strongly opposed it and the more neutral term of “management” was adopted). An equilibrium was re-established as these local agents listened to the dismayed mountain sheep-farmers more than to the noisy but sometimes irresponsible NPAs. This evolution was gradual, and it is still an ongoing process, but the mountain sheep-farmers have now a voice, which I think they won't lose.

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Notes

¹ Elements of this chapter have been presented orally in Apt and Aix (December 2, 1999), in Paris (March 1, 2000) and Rambouillet (October 2, 2000). A first publication occurred in France (Campion-Vincent 2002). I thank Adrienne Mayor for her revision and suggestions in 2002. All non-English quotations were translated by me.

² Murderous attacks on shepherds started in July 1764 and terrorised the region. Soldiers and later specialized wolf-hunters sent by the King met no success and France was laughed at in Europe. Casualties piled up until a gigantic wolf was killed on September 21, 1765 by the King's special envoy that received a huge bounty. But the deaths resumed in March 1767. The local nobility then took up the fight until another gigantic wolf was killed on June 19, 1767. The final toll was 250 attacks on humans in sixty-four parishes, 130 dead and seventy grievously wounded. Three victims out of four were under eighteen, two-thirds being women. As for wolves, 200 were killed in the region (Delort 1984:259–262; Pastoureau 2001:176–185). Today the story of the Gévaudan Beast is rewritten as fantasy so as to exonerate wolves. The latest well-known version is to be found in a popular film *The Brotherhood of the Wolf* (2001) that designated as culprit a Catholic priest motivated both by sadism and a desire to instill fear into his flock.

³ Term used as equivalent to the French “Département.”

⁴ This term, widely used in France, designates activities linked to open-air sheep-farming.

⁵ Exact title *Ministère de l'Ecologie et du Développement Durable* [Department of Ecology and Sustainable Development] (MEDD).

⁶ Exact title *Ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation, de la Pêche et des Affaires Rurales* [Department of Agriculture, Food, Fishing and Rural Affairs] (MAAPAR). Of its 30,000 agents, only 2,000 are located in Paris.

⁷ The euro/US dollar €/€ ratio oscillates between 0.80 and 1.20.

⁸ Woodlands in Paris and the Paris region. These four areas are highly frequented by city dwellers for leisure activities.

⁹ Gilbert Simon personal communication, December 29, 1999.

¹⁰ The enquiry unequivocally revealed that no presence of wolves was signaled west of the city of Genoa. This fact is confirmed in a fax from Luigi Boitani, (a biologist and an authority on wolves, his subject since 1973, who inspired the protection measures adopted in Italy during the 1970s) to the director of the national park of Mercantour. However, this expert explains that these “jumps” in the species' progression are not surprising: “Re-colonization does not proceed as the spread of an oil stain, but rather through the irregular appearance of new population nuclei, [...] these appearances occur where there are optimal conditions of quietness, abundance of wild and mostly domestic preys. Feeble quantities of domestic flocks are available in the provinces of Imperia and Savone” (Dobremez 1996:161–4).

¹¹ Gaul leader whose surrender to Julius Cesar in 52 BC marked the end of Gaul's resistance to Roman colonization. All French children learn this name in their first history lessons.

¹² Buying, selling, exhibiting or transporting protected reptiles was banned by law, destruction remaining however authorized for the two most venomous species *Vipera Aspis* et *Vipera Berus*.

¹³ Solange Pinton and Yvonne Verdier, anthropologists, personal communication, 1989. This tale has a naturalist basis, since some grass snakes, more common than vipers, also live in trees and rob the eggs (Gérard Naulleau, naturalist, personal communication, 1989).

¹⁴ François Poplin, personal communication, March 1, 2000.

¹⁵ And (rarely) damage to livestock. Episodes marked by important damage do exist: Cattle Mutilation Panics in the 1960s in the Western U.S.; Goat Suckers or *Chupacabras* that started in 1995 in Puerto Rico and expanded amongst U.S. Hispanics. However their discussion would take us beyond the focus of this chapter. These episodes are mostly promoted by “anomalists” and linked to extraterrestrial lore.

¹⁶ Rumors asserting that the Kentucky Wildlife Service proceeded to release rattlesnakes, sometimes from helicopters, so as to control the population of wild turkeys were reported in the *Kentucky Herald* of January 9, 1997, leading to the disabused commentary of a spokesman: “these rumors surge periodically, we do not know how or why” (Jan Harold Brunvand, personal communication January 10, 1997).

¹⁷ These methods: breeding wolves in captivity and later releasing them were proposed by IUCN The World Conservation Union.

¹⁸ PL refers to the wolf park of Gévaudan, close to the Cévennes National Park and main tourist attraction of the Lozère county in which the national park is enclosed.

¹⁹ “Behavior imitating the pattern of a rumor or of a legend, whether or not they are believed to be true” (Renard 1999:125).

²⁰ The expression originates in anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss’s 1963 essay *Totemism*.

Mad about Wildlife

Looking at social conflict over wildlife

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and
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