

Protecting Wolves, One Health and Humanity: Stop Crying Wolf! Cry for the Wolves
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Wolves embody the same spark that ignites and sustains the human spirit, and the One Health of Earth.

*“We humans should be noble because we are star dust, and humble because we are manure.”
~ Serbian saying.*



I speak and write about wolves as a veterinarian, scientist and bioethicist who has raised wolf cubs and studied their behavior, development and communication. Without wolves in my life, I would not likely have earned the doctor of science degree in animal behaviour/ethology from London University, England. I have authored and edited several academic books about wolves and other wild canids, and the award-winning book of fiction for children, *The Wolf*.

One of the founding fathers of the science of animal behavior/ethology, Nobel prize laureate Konrad Lorenz, MD, proclaimed “Before you can really study an animal you must first love it.” Native American Indian Chief Dan George put it this way: “If you talk to the animals, they will talk with you and you will know each other. If you do not talk to them, you will not know them, and what you do not know you will fear. What one fears one destroys.”

Those who know wolves would respect rather than seek to destroy them. I can attest to their high degree of intelligence, insight, playful humor and empathy as detailed in my popular book *The Soul of the Wolf*. Wolves are exemplary parents, instilling obedience in their cubs so essential for their survival as well as self-control, gentleness and pack-cooperation/mutual aid. They will bring food to a pack-mate who is injured, most often while hunting. Conflicts between packs are rare but when food is scarce there can be injuries, deaths and dispersal.

The vital role of wolves in contributing to the health of deer and other wildlife and their ecosystems, and to public health have been well documented. The ecological, environmental and public health services that wolves provide help rectify the ecological, environmental and public health costs of the livestock industry, too long denied. (<https://drfoxonehealth.com/post/wolves-and-human-well-being-ecological-public-health-concerns/>).

When subjected to human encroachment, shooting, trapping, snaring, denning and poisoning, the integrated nuclear-family and stabilizing pack and clan associations of wolves are disrupted, resulting in suffering, starvation and social conflicts. From a humane as well as from the scientific and bioethical perspectives of One Health, it is enlightened self-interest to protect wolves and engage in planetary “CPR” (conservation, preservation and restoration). Supporting cattle ranchers by exterminating wolves and other predators and subsidizing the beef industry simply fuels global warming, climate change and loss of biodiversity. It also perpetuates the unquestioned cultural norm and consumer health risks of meat-based diets.

The fundamental lesson from the ecology of wolf and other large predators is that they naturally control their numbers ([Arian D. Wallach et al. Oikos Feb. 16th 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1111/oik.01977>](https://doi.org/10.1111/oik.01977) See also <https://nywolf.org/2021/06/wolves-naturally-limit-their-own-numbers-2/>). There are too many of us who kill billions of animals annually from land and sea to consume as a dietary staple to not harm the environment. The most significant correctives are to transition to plant-based diets and the implementation of new food biotechnologies such as animal cell bioreactors producing safe and nutritious, cruelty-free analogs of meat and other animal products. This would eliminate the justification of predator control/killing; cruel farm animal factories and feedlots; stressful transportation and mass slaughter of terrified animals; put an end to hunting and fishing and to many foodborne illnesses; and reduce climate change and loss of biodiversity.

The giving and taking of lives, predators and prey, as the dynamics of forest, deer and wolf demonstrate, evidence how the ecological whole of biodiversity is maintained and sustained. Add the human takings of timber, mining, agriculture, hunting deer, incursion of livestock and land developers, and taking of wolves as trophies and for their fur is a crime against Nature and to the spirit and sensibilities of our own humanity.

Environmental/ecological eugenics is a relatively new and imprecise science involving the selective extermination of invasive species and re-introduction, like wolves into Yellowstone National Park and beavers into their original wetland habitats where they were trapped to extinction, with documented benefits in terms of enhanced natural biodiversity. Such eugenics of wildlife management and habitat restoration and conservation contrasts the harmful consequences of agribusiness food-industry eugenics with the selective killing of insects, for example, with insecticides that now threaten bees and other vital crop pollinators and have decimated naturally pest- controlling insectivorous amphibian, reptile, avian and bat populations: And the killing of predators to protect livestock that infect other wildlife with diseases, the absence of predators accelerating the loss of biodiversity and incursion of invasive species. The only justification to ever cull or relocate a wolf pack would be if they were to put endangered species at risk, which has never occurred. We humans put the most species at risk. Human-caused mortality has been shown to cause pack instability in gray wolves. (See “Human-caused mortality triggers pack instability in gray wolves” by Kira A Cassidy et al *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*. Jan 17th 2023.<https://doi.org/10.1002/fee.2597>).

It is perhaps poetic irony, if not Nature’s retribution, that we are suffering the catastrophic and escalating consequences of climate change and of potentially pandemic diseases transmitted from animals to humans that natural biodiversity once helped contain, as the science and bioethics of One Health affirms. An amendment to the U.S. Constitution incorporating the essence of a Universal Bill of Rights for Animals and Nature codified in 2011 in my book *Animals and Nature First* could establish the U.S. as the leader for the formation of a United Environmental Nations to collaboratively achieve the One Health imperatives of planetary CPR-(conservation, protection and restoration). We are surely not powerless to stop the wanton destruction, the needless killing and endless suffering. In a restored democracy there would be justice for all. From the Christian perspective of the Rev. James Parks Morton, “Ecology is the science of the body of Christ through which we of the Earth community learn our sacred connections.”

In respecting and protecting the wolf we do no less for our humanity. Chief Black Elk, an Oglala Lakota Sioux holy man, warrior, and survivor of Wounded Knee, proclaimed: “Nothing will be well unless we learn to live in harmony with the Power of the World as it lives and moves and does its work.” This Power of the World, from Nature’s life-sustaining biodiversity, is in every creature and breath we take. In harming this Power of the World, we fall from grace toward extinction as a rational, responsible and compassionate species. What kinds of human phenotypes/subspecies emerge from the Anthropocene apocalypse of what scientists are now calling Earth’s sixth mass extinction, remains to be seen. As Loren Eiseley observed, “One does not meet oneself until one catches the reflection from an eye other than human.”

We are the mothers and fathers of tomorrow, and how well we care for and protect wolves and all of our relations in Nature’s biodiversity today, will be our legacy. The Call of the Wild-the spirit of creative freedom and genius loci- will be no more if we do not effectively address the Nature Deficit Disorder in children and the escalating Empathy Deficit Disorder in most societies today. All school districts should have access to Natural History and Wildlife Education and Rehabilitation centers and online educational materials incorporating environmental education. The animal circus and road-side zoo “animal experience” is detrimental to a child’s cognitive and emotional development. We must recover the kind of sensibility expressed by Australian aboriginal elder Bill Neidjie: “If you feel sore...headache, sore body, that mean somebody killing tree or grass. You feel because your body in that tree or earth. Nobody can tell you, you got to feel it yourself.”

None of us could function well with half a lung; broken bones and blood poisoning; impaired nervous, endocrine and immune systems. Neither can planet Earth. These and other medical conditions are evident in analogous form in the environmental dysbiosis we have caused: felling forests, lungs of the Earth; breaking mountains apart and poisoning streams and waterways; polluting our air, food and water; decimating and disrupting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and the lives therein, plant, animal and microbial. These ecosystems are now disintegrating on the path toward extinction. Only in the advancement of One Health is there reason for hope, forever nascent in the spirituality of reverence for life and embedded in the principles of justice and frugality.

Wolves revered by indigenous peoples East and West. (<https://ralphhaussler.weebly.com/wolf-mythology>): In the Shinto religion of Japan the wolf is a guardian when it is properly attended to and cared for. Farmers used to worship wolves at shrines and left food offerings near their dens, beseeching them to protect their crops from wild boars and deer. Hindus traditionally considered that the hunting of wolves was a taboo since they feared that it may cause a bad harvest. According to Minnesota Ojibwe elder Jim Merhar “When the world started, the wolf was put here to help people. You can think of it almost like dogs today. The wolf is a partner to man.” (<https://northernwilds.com/culture-prophecy-bind-ojibwe-people-wolves>). In 2010, the Red Lake Band of Ojibwe in Minnesota, was the first to adopt a wolf management plan. They designated the band's 843,000 acres of land as a wolf sanctuary in an effort to help save wolves. To live and let live is a democratic ecological principle; a consummation devoutly to be wished in accord with the Golden Rule. As Albert Schweitzer advised, “Until he extends his circle of compassion to include all living things, man will not himself find peace.” Saving the wolf today will help save our humanity tomorrow.

POSTSCRIPT:

Wildlife photographer Jim Robertson, in his 2012 book about trophy hunting, [*Exposing the Big Game: Living Targets of a Dying Sport*](#) writes:

“Children the world over are taught a version of the golden rule, roughly along the lines of, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. “Kids are generally told that this directive applies to everyone, from their parents and teachers to their siblings and friends—not just to members of their in-group. And a lot of parents wouldn’t hesitate to invoke the golden rule to stop a child from hurting the family pet. Yet for many people, the bias of speciesism is so entrenched that they can’t seem to recognize a wild animal as a deserving other. But biases and isms are not written in stone. If humanity keeps evolving along a compassion continuum, we will inevitably apply the same rules of consideration to all creatures who have the ability to think and feel.

“Perhaps it’s time to update and clarify the golden rule to read: “Do unto other sentient beings as they would have you do unto them.”

If we live by a golden rule that includes all of the animal kingdom, we will never keep anyone captive, trap, poison or snare them or use them as living targets in a bloody, imbalanced game.

NOTE:

Addendum: Minnesota’s updated wolf plan “strengthens wolf conservation.”

The DNR has finalized an updated wolf management plan that incorporates the diverse views of Minnesotans and will guide the state’s approach to wolf conservation for the next 10 years. The plan includes summary information about Minnesota’s wolf population and the history of wolves in the state. It details the diverse and changing public attitudes about wolves, the legal status of wolves, tribal perspectives on wolves, and ways to support a healthy and resilient wolf population while minimizing conflicts between humans and wolves. The plan also includes a framework for how the state will approach decisions about wolf hunting or trapping if the wolf is delisted federally.

A full version of the updated plan and information about the planning process is on the [DNR wolf plan page](#).

In my opinion, allowing any hunting if the wolf population reaches some estimated number is ethically and ecologically unacceptable regardless of any claims that “harvesting” no more than 20% of an estimated population between 2,200 and 3,000 wolves is “sustainable”. There will be inevitable suffering of injured survivors and of pack -members losing their companions.

It is regrettable at this time of writing that Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland has taken no action to protect wolves under the Endangered Species Act from the relentless slaughter in Alaska, Wyoming, Idaho and Montana.

For an excellent recording of wolf howls, visit <https://youtu.be/JQUHDWHa7WQ>