

WOLF

A challenge to meet and learn
about the judicious management of wildlife
in the Greek countryside



ARCTUROS

3 VIKTOROS OUGO STR. • 546 25 THESSALONIKI GREECE • TEL. +30 31 554623 • FAX +30 31 553932 • <http://www.forthnet.gr/arcturos> • e-mail: arcturos@the.forthnet.gr

The wolf: a constant presence in the myths, the traditions, and the daily life of Greece



The wolf (*lykos*) is conspicuously present in ancient Greek mythology.

The retinue of the goddess Artemis included a wolf, as well as other animals.

Lykeios, 'lupine', is one of the most common epithets applied to Apollo, god of light, which tells us something about the origin of the Greek words *lykofos* (lit. 'wolf-light') and *lykavyes* (lit. 'wolf-dawn'), which mean 'dusk' and 'daybreak' respectively.

The coins of Argos, a city protected by Apollo, bore the likeness of a wolf until about the 5th c. BC.

There was a bronze wolf at one of the most famous sanctuaries of Apollo, the Delphic Oracle, probably in memory of the wolf that killed a robber in the temple close by and then guided pilgrims there.

At the south end of the Acropolis stand the ruins of the Lyceum (*Lykeion*), a place where Apollo was venerated. Aristotle taught

there when he was writing his *Inquiry into animals*. The chapter on wolves includes the myth of Apollo's birth on the island of Delos, according to which his mother, Leto, transformed into a wolf, voyaged to Delos from the land of the Hyperboreans accompanied by a pack of wolves.

In another myth, Zeus turned Lycaon, mythical King of Arcadia, and his sons into wolves after they had served him a sacrilegious meal. This is the origin of the name of Mount Lykaion in Arcadia. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates uses the myth of Lycaon to avert political conduct leading to tyranny.

Lycus was the name of the king who welcomed the Argonauts to Hades; and Euripides mentions a King Lycus in his plays *Heracles* and *Antiope*.

The wolf is a protagonist in several of Aesop's fables, which are known all over the world, and also in the traditions, the proverbs, and the folktales of modern Greece.

Many place-names in Greece

denote the presence of wolves: there are the villages of Lykotrihi and Lykostani near Dodona, Lykostomo near Kavala, Lykos near Filiates, Lyki near Edessa, Lykodromi and Lykovouni near Xanthi, Lykoyanni in Emathia, and Lykovrissi in Attica; and such names as Lykorrahi, Lykorema, and Lykolakka are commonly encountered in the mountains.

There is a surprising number of wolf-related place-names in the Peloponnese, which suggests that there were wolves there until quite recently: Lykoporia in Corinthia, Lykotrafos in Messenia, Lykissa in Pylia, Lykosoura near Megalopoli, Lykotrypi in Nafplia, to mention but a few.



«What have I eaten of yours, your anvil?»

The Greek people's innate sense of moderation has probably helped to maintain the wolf in this country.

When a housewife offered a drink or a snack to the hunters who were parading the wolf they'd killed around the village (actually, it was the wolf's hide stuffed with straw), she would throw a stone at it. She'd pick up a little stone from the ground and throw it, regardless of whether she hit or missed her mark. It was a kind of anathema.

The following story is told in connection with this custom.

On one occasion, the group who were parading the stuffed wolf around the village called in at the blacksmith's forge. True to custom, he offered the hunters something and threw his stone at the wolf. Whereupon the creature turned and said to him:

«Well, the others at least have a reason to throw stones at me, because I ate their sheep. But what have I eaten of yours, your anvil?»

A. D. Tsagarsoulis, *Kastraki, What a Lovely Place It Is* (in Greek), Zitis & Co., Thessaloniki, 1996

Geographically, the wolf was once the most widespread mammal on the planet. It has now disappeared from much of its former area of distribution, which covered almost the entire northern hemisphere. Since the 14th century, systematic efforts to wipe it out have eradicated it from 14 countries in central and western Europe. There has never been any attempt to totally exterminate wolves in Greece.



Because Greek shepherds have practised free-range grazing ever since ancient times, they have adopted ways of grazing and protecting their flocks that are well adapted to the specific features of the Greek countryside (climate, relief, vegetation, wildlife), one of which is the presence of wolves. One example of this adaptation is the use of the *Greek sheepdog* to guard the flocks efficiently.

Being one of the most evolved and intelligent mammals, the wolf has constantly adapted its habits and behaviour to the activities of the countryfolk. This has taught it to avoid dangerous situations and helped it to survive to the present day.

The presence of wolves has always aroused mixed feelings and reactions in the countryfolk. However, the Greek people's customs and traditions have probably helped the species to survive in Greece. Its spread today covers almost all of mainland Greece, apart from the Peloponnese, where it had disappeared by the end of the 1930s. Nowadays distribution of the species cover about 36,000 to 40,000 sq. kilometres. Current population estimation is about 500 to 700 individuals.



Characteristics of the wolf - Life in the pack

The wolf is the largest member of the family *Canidae*, and is characterised by a high level of intelligence and well-developed social organisation. It acquired its present form one and a half million years ago. The fur of the Mediterranean wolf is predominantly brown and grey. It weighs 20–40 kilos and has a lifespan of 8–16 years.

The wolf is a carnivore and feeds mainly on wild herbivorous animals (ungulates) when these exist in sufficient densities. But when its usual prey is unavailable or very scarce, the highly adaptable wolf turns to smaller vertebrates, livestock, or even anthropogenic sources of food, such as garbage or dead animals. The wolf has become an efficient hunter, even of animals much larger than itself, by developing co-operative methods in the pack, which are based on a strict and fixed social hierarchy. One characteristic common to wolf populations all over the world is their social organisation in groups or packs, both large and small. Usually only one pair of wolves in the pack reproduces, the dominant pair.



Its body features and its hunting skills are adapted to enable it to immobilise its prey easily. It has a large head and powerful jaws (with a bite twice as strong as a dog's), a narrow chest, long legs, and a light skeleton, enabling it to cover long distances and make its way

through snow easily. Wolves have tremendous stamina, running or walking fast for eight to ten hours a day and covering many kilometres in the process.





Wolves use all their senses to locate and track down their prey. They can see moving objects over a long distance and their night vision is good. Their most highly developed senses are hearing and smell. Their nasal cavity is fourteen times greater, proportionately, than humans'.



Wolves communicate with each other with a variety of sounds, though they reveal their moods and intentions mainly through facial expressions and specific body postures. When they are very far apart, they communicate by howling: they can hear each other howling up to ten kilometres away. The members of a pack howl in order to locate one another, but also to drive an intruder from another pack out of their territory.

Each pack moves within a strictly defined area, its territory, which the dominant male marks out by urinating around the perimeter.



The nucleus of the pack is the dominant reproductive pair, which may stay together all their lives. The wolf reaches reproductive maturity at 22 months. The female produces a litter of 3–7 cubs once a year, in spring, after a pregnancy of about 63 days. While she is suckling them, she is fed by the male. When they are weaned, the cubs are fed on food regurgitated by the adult members of the pack. Other pack-members, apart from the parents, help to rear the cubs, bringing them food and protecting them. Young wolves who are going to leave the pack start to do so at the age of about one year, gradually moving out of the area in which they were born in search of territory of their own.





Factors that adversely affect the wolf's future in Greece



The reduction in the numbers of the wolf's natural prey (such as deer and wild boar), which is due to human factors, has forced it to turn to livestock, thus exacerbating the conflict with human beings.

A gradual relaxation of ways and means of damage prevention methods has aggravated the conflict between people and wolves. It is due to the fact that the new social models and economic factors that prevail today have established new practices in stock-breeding that differ considerably from the traditional ones; and at the same time, they have also changed the general attitude to stock-breeding as an occupation.

Some stock-breeders resort to the illegal killing of wolves as the most immediately effective way of protecting their flocks.

Illegal use of poisoned bait poses a threat not only to the wolf but to all the local fauna.

Changes in the use of land and major technical works carried out without any environmental planning prevent subpopulations of wolves from moving about freely and communicating with each other.

The rampant rumours that wolves have been 'set free' by well-meaning 'ecologists' mislead both stock-breeders and public opinion and make it more difficult for them to accept measures for the proper management of the species.

There is a general lack of information about the need for measures to ensure the survival of the species in the long term.

There is a need for a modern, flexible legislative framework for managing the wolf population.

"WOLF" - A LIFE Programme



The WOLF project is being carried out by Arcturos between 1998 and 2000. Fifty per cent of the funding comes from the European Union (DG XI LIFE-NATURE) and the rest from Arcturos and the Ministry of Agriculture.

The basic principle behind the project

No species should disappear because of human beings. The human race has to find ways of co-existing with all other species.

BASIC ACTIVITIES

Collecting data about the wolf

- Distributing questionnaires throughout Greece to collect information, mainly from stock-breeders, in the areas where the wolf is present.

- Radio-tracking wolves in the project area under investigation (mainland Greece) to collect the data about the ecology of the Greek wolf that are vital to any policy for managing the species.

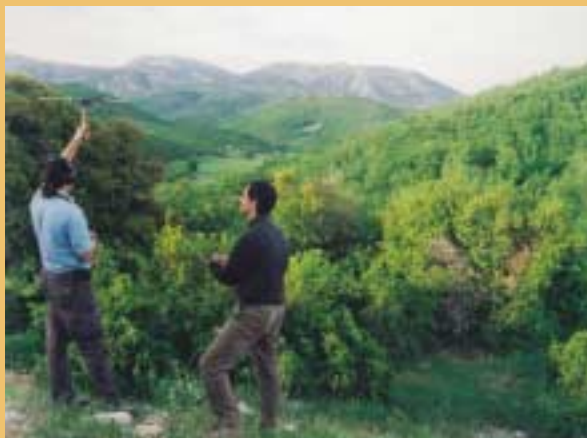
- Listing rubbish dumps (which are anthropogenic sources of food for wolves) and evidence of dependency on them; evaluating the repercussions of this behaviour.

Activities relating to the protection of livestock

- Breeding *Greek sheepdogs* and supplying them to stock-breeders in the project area under investigation with the aim of reducing the damage inflicted on livestock by wolves.

- Providing supplementary compensation for stock-breeders in the project area under investigation in cases when the relevant insurance agency (Greek Agricultural Insurance) covers losses only partially or not at all.

- Working with the GAI to revise the national compensation system with regard to damage caused by wolves.



Because there are very few purebred Greek sheepdogs left today, it is considered necessary to make systematic efforts to preserve and reinstate the breed.

Activities connected with the loss of basic aspects of habitat

- Investigating the possibility of enriching a selected area of mainland Greece with species of wild ungulates (red deer).
- Mapping the habitat and taking note of human interventions that may affect communication between wolf subpopulations.

Activities that raise public awareness

- Holding meetings to brief agencies involved in preserving the wolf.
- Publishing information leaflets.
- Setting up a network of local assistants in the project areas.
- Organising events to inform the public in areas where the programme is being implemented in Greece.
- The Wolf Refuge at Agrapidia, Florina prefecture, will be a centre where people can obtain information and learn more about wolves on organised guided tours.

Setting up facilities for nursing and sheltering wolves that have been confiscated

The Veterinary Station at Aetos and the Wolf Refuge at Agrapidia, Florina prefecture, have been set up to assist efforts to stamp out the illegal private possession of wolves in captivity.

Confiscated animals are sterilised and kept at the refuge for the rest of their natural lives, because even a brief period of captivity means that they cannot be returned to their natural environment with any chance of survival.



Legislative protection

Europe: *the wolf is protected by the Berne Convention and Community Directive 92/43.*

Greece: *in view of this, the wolf was removed from the list of vermin in 1991 and is officially regarded as a vulnerable species.*



Bibliography

- L. N. Carbyn, S. H. Fritts, and D. R. Serp, *Ecology and Conservation of Wolves in a Changing World of Wolf Research*, Canadian Circumpolar Institute, University of Alberta, Canada, 1995
- M. Link and K. Crowley, *Following the Pack: The World of Wolf Research*, Voyager Press, Canada, 1998
- B. H. Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men*, Touchstone, New York, 1995
- G. Sfika, *Greek Nature Down the Ages* (in Greek), Mikri Vivliothiki, Athens, 1985
- A. D. Tsagaroulis, *Kastraki, What a Lovely Place It Is* (in Greek), Zitiis & Co., Thessaloniki, 1996
- Photographs taken from:**
- Candace Savage, *Wolves*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1988
- N. Gibson, *Wolves*, Colin Baxter Photography Ltd., Scotland 1996
- M. Greeley, *Wolf*, Metro Books, New York, 1996
- P. Hook, *Wolves*, Gramercy Books, New York, 1998
- L. Lee Rue III, *Wolves: Portrait of the Animal World*, Todtri, New York, 1996
- History of the Greek Nation* (in Greek), vol. III2, Ekdotike Athinon, Athens, 1972
- E. Papadimitriou, *Old Photographs: Epirus and Macedonia* (in Greek), Athens, 1977
- Arcturos photographic archive

One must proceed without confusion
to the study of every living being,
for nature and beauty
reside in all of them.

Heraclitus



General Secretariat
for Forests
and the Natural Environment,
Ministry of Agriculture