

## **Aug 16, 2013. WTE Editor's headline: "Ugly Animals Nee Love Too"**

In Yellowstone National Park a bison cow had died, apparently of natural causes. Her orphaned calf, bleating, attracted the Druid Pack, one of the dozen or so wolf packs in the Park. A female, dubbed Dull Bar by observing biologists, grabbed the calf by its neck as two more wolves joined in. The commotion attracted the bison herd, which succeeded in running off the wolves. The wolves later fed on the mother's carcass, its calf safe inside the herd. However, when at six AM the next morning the herd moved on, the calf returned to its mother's carcass. Soon Wolf 302 of the Druids spotted the calf and its fate was sealed.

"There's no easy way to die in the wild," comments Joe Roman, who observed the incident together with a biologist. Alone and not yet weaned, the calf would have starved to death; hence, the wolves provided a quick if painful death. Wolf 302, not long ago the focus of a PBS series, has a huge fan base among wolf observers. He shared his meal with pack mates and even a newcomer wolf.

Once-sleepy Lamar Valley in Yellowstone has become a popular wolf-observation point, an "essential stop" on tours. When Fish and Wildlife Service proposed in 1994 to reintroduce wolves to Yellowstone, officials estimated that increased visitor expenditures would be about \$23 million per year. A recent study suggests, visitors spend over \$35 million in the Yellowstone region, just to see and hear wolves." The canids have thrived, their numbers increasing to more than five times what was originally projected, writes Joe Roman in his 2011 "Listed." Human interest has developed in tandem.

There are trade-offs. Local ranchers were compensated \$460,000 for livestock losses to wolves. Still, that's a fraction of "the millions wolf watchers are pouring into local communities," writes Roman. Opportunistic wolves do take livestock, but their impact is small compared to disease, or even "to coyotes and bears."

Predator control against livestock killers is swift and no-holds-barred: these wolves are hunted, trapped, or shot from helicopters. In 2009, 272 wolves were thus eliminated. The state of Wyoming pays each rancher seven times the replacement value of each calf killed.

All the same, the wolf packs are unwittingly restoring the health of the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem. "We were over capacity," said one biologist about elk in the 1990s, when Yellowstone elk numbered close to twenty thousand. In the absence of wolves, elk browsing had reduced young trees to candlesticks. As the riverine trees disappeared, so did beavers that had nothing to eat. So did beaver ponds. A "trophic cascade" was in process; he thought he'd never see young willows or quaking aspens coming back to Yellowstone. Today saplings are growing once again along the riverbanks, helping protect trout fishing by cooling the rivers.

The focus of "Listed" is the much-maligned Endangered Species Act. The author voices criticism of some aspects of the ESA, and I have heard similar comments from wildlife wardens. ESA aims merely to take away the danger of extinction, but preserving the "ghost of a population" isn't relevant. Listed species showed no signs of recovery if they were not

backed by substantial funds. “Loveable species,” furry and sociable, and creatures with large eyes and expressive faces, capture the imagination—and the funding.

Hence the charge that Congress emphasizes individual organisms when it’s their habitat that needs attention. ESA is “stuck in a childlike view of the world, where furry animals—ones that resemble us or that we can fish and hunt—grab our attention,” writes Roman. Further, despite their enormous value, endangered trees and plants don’t get the funding they deserve. And money will and does “buy you recovery.” If all species are equal, we should use a more equal approach. The meadow jumping mouse has had more money spent on it than the blue whale.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act has it right, says the author, with its goal that each species play a significant functional role in its ecosystem. The greater the number of animals in a population, the more chance for genetic diversity.

Overall, the benefits of ESA steps taken on behalf of wildlife have far outweighed their costs. He examines the comeback of the bald eagle, now numerous in Yellowstone; the black-footed ferret, also in Wyoming; the panther in Florida, thanks to importation of Texan cougars; the Florida manatee, a popular visitors-attraction.

Humans must reduce our ecological footprints, the author argues. Climate change, bulging human populations, and our voracious appetites wreak havoc on our planet’s ecosystems. Up to 90 percent of the large predatory fish have been hunted out. A billion frogs are harvested from the wild every year, and “about ten thousand metric tons of frog legs are shipped internationally, mostly into France, Belgium, and the United States.” Such harvesting is not only unsustainable, it’s unconscionable. Reducing consumption and stabilizing human population are essential steps; without these measures, we have little chance of reversing the course of species’ decline. As ecological economics has shown us, improving the lives of people and wildlife requires a just distribution of resources.