

Prof. H. Mendelssohn  
Department of Zoology  
Tel Aviv University  
69978 Tel Aviv  
ISRAEL

Mr. R.-F. Dubois  
President  
International Wolf Federation  
Froide Fontaine 1  
4577 OUTRELOUXHE  
BELGIUM

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Dear Mr. Dubois

Thank you for your kind letter of 23 June.

With regard to your questions: In all countries of the Near East, carnivores are traditionally considered as pests to be destroyed at any cost. This includes, of course, the wolf. As herbivores have been reduced in numbers or exterminated by unrestricted overhunting, wolves had to rely on domestic animals, a fact that has aggravated the animosity towards them. Carnivores are controlled by shooting, traps, and poison. The fact that some carnivores still survive is probably due to the low human population density in most countries, but with the unrestricted human population explosion in the Near East countries, this situation is changing.

Palestine, before part of it became Israel, was under British rule from the end of World War I. Up until then, it was under Turkish rule and the Ottoman laws did not refer to hunting or wildlife. The general attitude in the Near East is that because wild animals do not belong to anyone, they can be taken by everyone and by any means. The British Government in Palestine published what they called "The Game Ordinance" - a kind of hunting law. It regulated open and closed seasons specifying where and how animals could be hunted. It was quite remote from reality, as hunting was regulated for species that did not occur in Palestine or that were already extinct. Carnivores, including the wolf, were declared as vermin and could be destroyed by any means. The Jewish population, mostly of European origin and accustomed to respect the law, did so, but the Arab population, then the majority, did not care for the law, which they did not understand, and Arab policemen, theoretically supposed to enforce the law, used their guns in order to hunt or to shoot carnivores.

When, in 1948, the State of Israel was established, laws were enacted to replace the British and Turkish laws that were still in force. I was asked to suggest a new hunting law to replace the Game Ordinance. I instead suggested a law that was to be called "Wild Animals' Protection Law" that, in principle, protects all wild mammals and birds. (The Game Ordinance referred only to mammals and birds, so reptiles and amphibians had to wait and fish were being taken care of by other laws). There were exceptions, however - a few species that were declared as pests, and a number of species that were declared as game and had open and closed seasons. This law was enacted in 1954. All of the 17 carnivore species, including the wolf, were now protected, apart from the jackal (*Canis aureus syriacus*), that was considered a pest. This situation proved to be a grave mistake, for several pest control officers in the Ministry of Agriculture, who had to justify earning their salaries, organised a huge poisoning campaign "in order to control jackals that cause much damage to agriculture". Of course, other carnivores were also affected by the poison baits. After this experience, the jackal was removed from the list of pests and was added to the list of protected carnivores. The public accepted the complete protection of carnivores, including unpopular species like the jackal and the wolf. Two weeks ago a rabid wolf bit several people, but no-one in Israel asked for the control of wolves. This is the situation here.

In other Near East countries, the situation remains the same as I have described it for Palestine when it was under Turkish rule. Some countries have established nature reserves in which animals are more or less protected. Even if there is some kind of nature protection, carnivores are not included. Only Saudi Arabia established an "Institute for Wildlife Management and Protection" and carnivores are legally protected there, but the people in the open areas, the Bedouin, do not uphold. The situation is aggravated by the fact that in many countries of the Near East, rabies is endemic and poison baits are freely distributed in order to control rabies-carrying carnivores. In Israel, foxes and feral dogs are the main carriers and are controlled by shooting. The government veterinarians try to use poison baits, but are also studying how to apply oral inoculation of foxes, which has been so successful in Europe.

The primary damage of wolves in Israel is predation of livestock, calves of range cattle, and attacking cows during parturition. Cattle in cowsheds are easily protected by electric fences, and range cattle can be protected by dogs (the strain used in the Golan is Pyranees). The Nature Reserves Authority (NRA) tries to find a way to compensate herd owners for their losses, as is done so successfully in Italy and other countries. Wolf predation is particularly severe in the Golan where cattle are kept on the range all the year round, and cows deliver on the range and are unprotected by electric fences. Unfortunately, among the wolves on the Golan are many wolf-dog hybrids, that apparently cause much damage to the cattle herds, possibly more than the wolves (Bibikov, 1990; Okarma, 1997). The NRA is reluctant to control the hybrids that increase and spread among the wolf population, but is carrying out a long-term research on the wolf-hybrid problem.

However, wolves in Israel are safe from persecution, The main mortality factor is being run over on the busy, too-many roads.

You ask have the wolves learned not to cross the borders, but stay in Israel? Unfortunately, they have not, as the following will show. A ranger from the NRA in Eilat made a study of the wolves of the area. He trapped about 20 of them and equipped them with radio transmitters. Three of them crossed the Jordanian border and were promptly shot, notwithstanding that their collars showed that they were someone's property. This incidence demonstrates the situation of the wolf in the Near East countries outside of Israel.

Sincerely yours

H. Mendelssohn

**cc Timber Wolf Information Network**