Chapter 8

WOLVES AND THE FINNISH WILDERNESS: CHANGING FORESTS AND THE PROPER PLACE FOR WOLVES IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY FINLAND

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Introduction

These days, if wolves roam close to human settlements, Finnish people often argue that there is something unnatural in their behaviour. This is the case especially in western Finland, where wolf packs are now being observed after a long period of absence.[1] Not all local people have welcomed wolves as their neighbours. For instance, in a demonstration held in 2018 in Vaasa, a coastal city in Ostrobothnia in western Finland, one participant stated that 'wolves do belong to Finland but in the wilderness. There is no wilderness in Ostrobothnia.'[2] Wolves have been connected to the wilderness in many countries and regions in the world.[3] In some areas, the notion that the wolf belongs to the wilderness is old: for instance, historian Aleksander Pluskowski has argued that there was a persistent conceptual link between wolves and the wilderness in Britain and

1. Nowadays, wolves exist almost everywhere in Finland, outside the reindeer herding area in the north. Now, more wolves live in western Finland than in the eastern part of the country, which was previously their main habitat. *Suomen susikannan painopiste yhä enemmän lännessä*, Natural Resources Institute Finland.

2. 'Susimielenosoitus keräsi torin täyteen väkeä Vaasassa – "Veikkaan, että äänemme kuultiin tänään"', *Yle* 11 June 2018.

3. See for instance, Lopez 1978, pp. 140–44; Mech 1995, p. 271; Tonnaer 2020.

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Scandinavia during the Middle Ages.[4] In this article, I look into the idea that wolves belong to the wilderness and trace its history in the Finnish context.

By looking at newspaper reports, magazine articles and contemporary literature, I ask when, how and why the wilderness came to signify the proper place for wolves in Finland. I argue that it is a relatively new and controversial notion connected to various social and environmental changes.

Wolves that move about near humans

The Finnish wolf population declined at the turn of the twentieth century, but a few hundred years ago, there could have been almost 1,400 wolves in Finland.[5] According to historian Jouko Teperi, wolves inhabited the whole country before the decline. During the nineteenth century, the human population grew, human settlements spread, logging increased and cultivated land expanded. Consequently, peoples' and wolves' living spaces began to partly overlap. Teperi writes how Finns often observed wolves near human settlements, especially during winter. Nineteenth-century newspapers wrote about peoples' encounters with wolves on roads and how wolves, their tracks and kills were seen in cattle pastures and near peoples' houses. Finns did not appreciate this kind of behaviour but still described it as typical for wolves.[6]

Similar attitudes were voiced during the first part of the twentieth century. Even though it is likely that only a few wolves lived in Finland at this time, the zoological book *Suomen luurankoiset (Vertebrata Fennica)* published in 1909 claimed that, during summer, wolves inhabit 'deserted forests', but during winter, particularly in freezing weather, often approached human-inhabited areas in large packs.[7] The newspaper *Wasabladet* reported in June 1901 that wolves had headed out to human-inhabited areas in the Oulu region in northern Ostrobothnia early that year in search of better food.[8] In these descriptions, wolves did not live permanently near humans, but visiting built-up areas was presented as an established habit. Newspapers continued to write about such visits as the twentieth century progressed.[9]

4. Pluskowski has studied the period from the eighth to the mid-fourteenth century. Pluskowsk 2006.
5. Aspi et al. 2006, pp. 1569, 1572; Jansson et al. 2014, p. 2.
6. Teperi 1977; Lähdesmäki & Ratamäki 2015.
7. Salovaara 1930, p. 111; Kivirikko 1940, p. 24. All translations are made by the writer.
8. Wargar, *Wasabladet* 18 July 1901, p. 3.
9. Lähdesmäki 2020b.

Wolves were depicted near humans also in illustrations published in hunting magazines. In 1908, *Suomen metsästyslehti*, published by the Finnish Hunting Association, contained an illustration with three wolves approaching a house (see Figure 1).[10] In 1912 and 1916, the magazine's successor, *Metsästys ja Kalastus*, published pictures with wolves walking near human settlements (Figures 2 and 3).[11] All these pictures depict wintertime. We do not know what the magazine's publishers wished to express to readers with these illustrations. They may have caused worry and fear but might have also strengthened the idea that it is common for wolves to visit built-up areas.

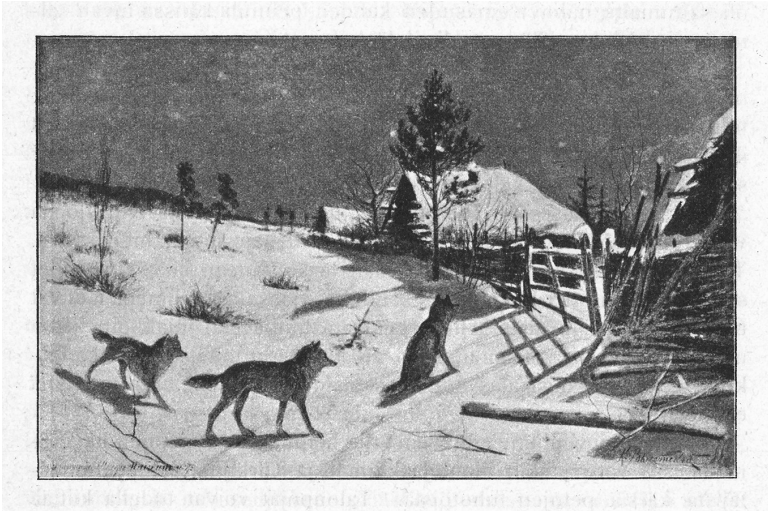

Figure 1. Three wolves approach a closed yard. Source: Suomen metsästyslehti 10/1908, p. 301.

According to local newspapers and hunting magazines, wolves were quickly chased away and killed, if possible, whenever they were observed near built-up areas.[12] This was possible because of the wolf's legal status before 1973 as a harmful animal that could be killed anywhere by anyone.[13] What is significant is that, even though people wanted to kill them, wolves' behaviour was not described as unnatural or abnormal in the first half of the twentieth

10. *Suomen metsästyslehti* 10/1908, p. 301.

11. *Metsästys ja Kalastus* 2/1912, p. 41; *Metsästys ja Kalastus* 2/1916, p. 3.

12. Lähdesmäki 2020b.

13. See *Hunting Act*, 290/1962.

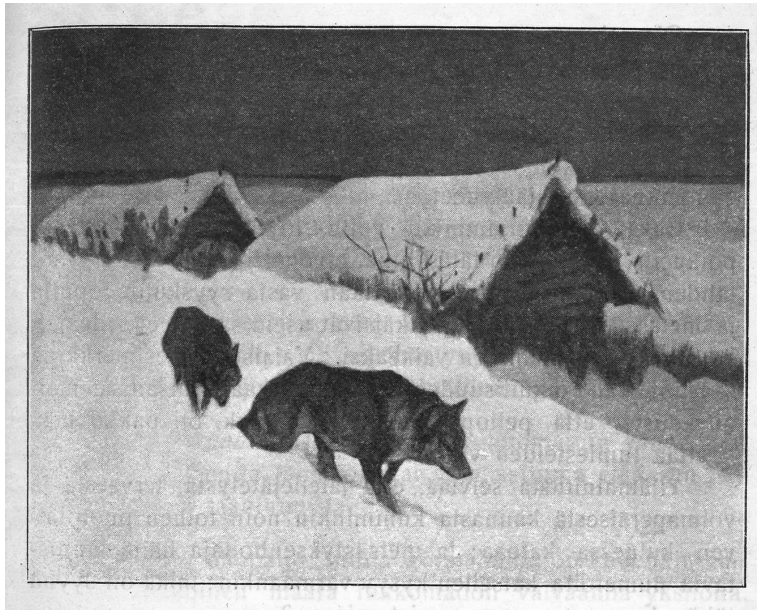

Figure 2. Two wolves walk past barns. Source: Metsästys ja Kalastus 2/1916, p. 3.

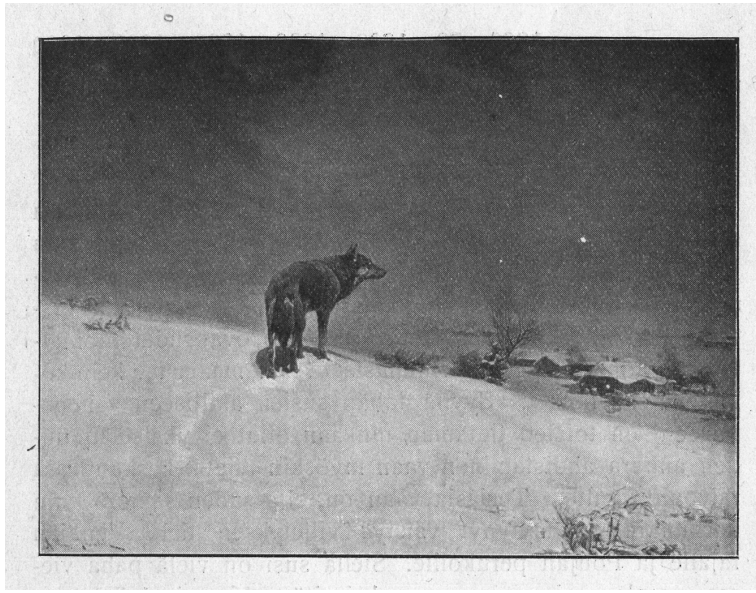

Figure 3. A lone wolf looks at a group of houses. Source: Metsästys ja Kalastus 2/1912, p. 41. This illustration is a copy of the painting 'Samotny Wilk' (The lone wolf) by Polish artist Alfred Wierusz-Kowalski (1849–1915).

century. Visits were sometimes condemned as irritating and unfortunate but, most of the time, newspapers and magazines merely stated the fact in a declarative way. Sometimes, the articles pondered why wolves had roamed to built-up areas. Cold weather and hunger were presented as reasons, and sometimes the behaviour was stated to be 'normal' and 'natural' for wolves.[14]

During the second half of the twentieth century, the way people understood wolves' behaviour changed. It was no longer 'normal' for wolves to visit or live part-time in areas inhabited by humans. At the beginning of the century, wolves that moved about near humans were occasionally called *brave*.[15] Later similar behaviour was described as *bold* and *arrogant*. For instance, in April 1949, newspaper *Lapin Kansa* stated that a wolf individual had been 'arrogant' because it had circled a village in Lapland.[16]

I argue that these arrogant wolves were considered to be stepping out of place by visiting human settlements. Animal geographers use the concept of being 'out of place' to highlight, as Chris Philo writes, how 'animals often squeeze out of the places – or out of the roles that they are supposed to play in certain places – which have been allotted to them by human beings'.[17] Wolves were arrogant and out of place because the way Finns defined the cultural environment had changed to exclude their presence. According to a new sociospatial order, wolves and humans did not coexist.

Wolves out-of-placeness was connected to the changing ways in which Finns perceived uncontrollability and fear. Wolves' presence caused people to be afraid of attacks on domestic animals and even humans.[18] As Finnish society modernised, fear of predators was no longer something that was part of normal human life. People were more able to control their lives than, for instance, in the nineteenth century when, according to Teperi, Finns perceived wolves as an uncontrollable force of nature.[19] As uncontrollability and fear became 'abnormal' factors in human life, wolves' proper place was discursively marginalised and pushed away from built-up areas to the wilderness.

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14. See for instance 'Susia Vuoksenniskalla', *Metsästys ja Kalastus* 3/1912, p. 29; 'Toivo Kuparinen: Petoja rajaseudun maisemassa', *Metsästys ja Kalastus* 9/1960, p. 337; Siivonen 1956, p. 144.
15. See Mela and Kivirikko 1909, p. 26; 'Sudet', *Suomen metsästyslehti* 2/1908, p. 56.
16. Hukat röyhkeinä Sodankylässä, *Lapin Kansa* 20.4.1949, p. 1.
17. Philo 1995, p. 656.
18. About the fear of wolves attacking and killing humans in Finland, see for instance Lähdesmäki 2020a.
19. Teperi 1977, pp.73–75; Lähdesmäki 2020b, p. 208.

'In the wilderness, one hears the howl of the wolf'

Wolves and wilderness had already been connected in the nineteenth century. For instance, in 1880, the newspaper *Uusi Suometar* described how wolves make their dens in the dense forests of the wilderness.[20] Still, I argue that this connection was not emphasised until the twentieth century. The popular zoological book *Suuri nisäkäskirja* (1956), associated wolves clearly with wilderness while describing their shyness:

> This quality [shyness] is present only when a wolf meets a human; I doubt if a wolf is afraid of anything but humans in the wilderness … You can hear its call and try to catch it in vain as if you were catching the wind. However, this is only in the wilderness, where it has a secure livelihood and is not teased by hunger.[21]

Later the book stated that '[i]t is a true call of the wilderness, warning and gloomy when wolves howl'.[22] Forty-one years later, the popular zoological book *Suomen luonto* (1997) also connected the howl with wilderness: 'The howl of wolves is a moving, unforgettable song of the wilderness.'[23]

Wolves were connected to the wilderness also through illustrations in popular zoological books. Wolves, their traces and dens were now primarily depicted in wilderness-like environments such as forests or wetlands that had no apparent signs of human activity.[24]

In 1960, the hunting magazine *Metsästys ja Kalastus* argued clearly that wolves and other large predators belong to the forests and that their proper place was not near humans.[25] Similarly, an opinion piece writer stated in the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* in 1997 that large predators belong to Finnish national parks and 'other uninhabited areas'.[26] It seems that many contemporary Finns shared this view: The vast majority of participants of two opinion surveys conducted in the late 1990s considered the wolf to be a resident of wilderness areas. Some hoped wolves would live somewhere with enough wilderness for them to live without causing too much harm to humans, such as

20. Sudet Pomarkussa, *Uusi Suometar* 7.6.1880, p. 6.
21. Siivonen 1956, pp. 145–46.
22. Ibid., p. 147.
23. Kojola 1997, p. 157.
24. See Siivonen 1956, p. 139; Siivonen 1972, pp. 101, 145.
25. Toivo Kuparinen, 'Petoja rajaseudun maisemassa', *Metsästys ja Kalastus* 9/1960, p. 340.
26. 'Laki ja suojelu sekaisin', *Helsingin Sanomat* 26 July 1997, p. A17 (opinion piece, written by Ulla Hyttinen, Vihti).

nature reserves and national parks in Lapland and Eastern Finland.[27] In reality, Finnish conservation areas did not guarantee protection until the latter part of the century: wolf hunting became forbidden in all Finnish nature reserves in the 1990s, but is still allowed in some national parks and Lapland due to reindeer husbandry in the area.[28]

Even though people occasionally saw wolves near built-up areas and even in peoples' yards at the end of the twentieth century, many Finns believed that wolves actually *need* wilderness areas to thrive.[29] For instance, the popular zoological book *Suomen eläimet I* (1983) stated that wolves need peace and protection from humans.[30] Finns were not alone with this view: biologist David Mech argues that the idea that wolves require habitat free of human influences to survive is a misconception and that equating wolves with wilderness results from wolves being exterminated in most areas except wilderness.[31]

The idea that wolves should only live in the wilderness and are out of place elsewhere was linked to geographical othering, described by Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert. In Western countries, population centres such as cities are suitable areas for pets or companion animals, while rural areas are for livestock animals. This leaves unoccupied lands beyond the margins of human settlement and agriculture, often called the wilderness, for wild animals such as wolves. In reality, the world does not divide into clear and separate areas for different species to live in.[32] Wolf individuals visiting human settlements challenged the notion that wolves live in the wilderness. Still, this notion was not entirely imaginary. Because the number of wolves living in Finland was small, fewer wolves were seen near humans during the twentieth century compared to the previous century. The visits were infrequent, making this behaviour seem abnormal. Wolves might have also changed their behaviour: According to present-day wolf researchers, when wolves are persecuted, they tend to become more wary of humans. Also, wolves that are cautious toward humans might live longer

27. Lumiaro 1997, pp. 12, 15, 41; Vikström 2000, pp. 77–78.

28. *Nature Conservation Act* (1096/1996), 13 §.

29. See for instance, Ritva Liikkanen, 'Salametsästäjät ilmeisesti estävät Suomen susikantaa kasvamasta', *Helsingin Sanomat* 15 Jan. 1998, p. A5; Lumiaro 1997, pp. 12, 15, 41. About the visits, see Ahti Takala, 'Susi vieraili Lappajärvellä', *Metsästys ja Kalastus* 4/1982, p. 57; 'Punahilkkaoireyhtymä vaivaa Kuhmossa', *Suomen Luonto* 3/1997, pp. 45–46.

30. Pulliainen 1983, p. 193.

31. Mech 1995, p. 271; Fritts et al. 2003, p. 300.

32. Philo and Wilbert 2007, pp. 10–11.

than less cautious wolves.[33] Therefore, it might have been beneficial for wolves to live further away from humans or at least stay unnoticed.

Wilderness imagined

Interestingly, as the idea that wolf is a wilderness species grew stronger in Finland, areas where wolves could live outside human influence grew fewer. Population growth and expansion of human habitation altered the landscape shared by these two species. The number of people living in Finland grew from over 2.6 million at the beginning of the twentieth century to over 5.1 million in 2000.[34] At the same time, the agricultural land area increased. The field area was at its maximum in 1968, at over 2.6 million hectares. [35] Also, the expansion of the road and rail networks fragmented the landscape. The road network expanded from 32,000 km in 1915 to 77,993 km in 2000.[36] The railway often ran parallel to the roads, narrowing ecological corridors. In many countries, roads have also raised the risk of wolves being killed by people.[37] In Finland too, people have been able to use roads when killing wolves.[38]

Finns have used and altered forests for hundreds of years, for instance, for the production of tar and for slash-and-burn cultivation. During twentieth century, the use of forests intensified and mechanised. In the 1950s and 1960s, logging was mechanised, forest roads were built for forest machines, forests were fertilised, brushwood was poisoned and forest plantations were planted. Forest growth was increased by draining swamps and wetlands. Intensive forestry has changed and is changing Finnish forests in many ways: the age structure of forests has become younger, vast wilderness areas have vanished and forests are fragmented. At the same time, forest biodiversity has decreased.[39] Even though Finland has of the largest forest areas in the European Union (almost eighty per cent of land area is forests), Finnish forests are mainly commercial.[40]

33. Fritts et al 2003, pp. 300–02.
34. Statistics Finland, population structure.
35. Salokangas 2003, p. 673; Vihola 2004, pp. 332–39.
36. Salokangas 2003, p. 676; Kiiskinen 1999, pp. 9–10, 13, 100–01; Finnish Road Statistics 2009; The Finnish Railway Statistics 2016.
37. Fritts et al 2003, p. 301; Laaksonen 2013, p. 46.
38. Lähdesmäki 2020b, p. 174.
39. Myllyntaus 1999, pp. 101–02; Puttonen 2006, p. 79; Leikola 2006, pp. 87–88.
40. Nègre 2022; *Forest Resources in Finland*.

After these societal and environmental changes, Finland had no true wilderness where wolves could roam outside human influence. Similar changes also happened elsewhere: wolves have lost their habitat throughout Europe and North America due to human activity and, nowadays, most of the world's wolves live near humans.[41] Still, urbanisation – which took place relatively late in Finland compared to many other western countries – helped to create the idea that there could still be vast wilderness areas in the country. Finnish society was agrarian until the 1950s but only two decades after that, in 1970, more than half the Finnish population lived in cities and towns.[42]

The meaning of the Finnish word for wilderness, *erämaa*, has also changed. The idea of wilderness is connected to the Romantic period, nature conservation movement and nationalism. Previously feared, untamed nature began to be seen as aesthetically beautiful in the western world at the end of the eighteenth century. During the first half of the twentieth century, the English term *wilderness* started to signify vast, pristine areas and authentic, pure nature, often without a past or human presence. The idea that wilderness has no human past is, as several environmental historians have argued, problematic. Many areas perceived as wilderness have been inhabited for millennia by humans and human influence can be seen almost everywhere in the world.[43]

However, the notion of *erämaa* has included humans. The word's etymology is connected to the hunting and fishing culture practised from the prehistorical era to at least the Middle Ages in the area today called Finland. Historically, *erämaa* has meant an area where a house or village community has the right to hunt. Still, as geographer Jarkko Saarinen notes, different people in Finland have had and still have conflicting notions about wilderness. According to Saarinen, there are at least three discourses on wilderness in present-day Finland: *conserved wilderness* functions as a 'biodiversity container', *traditional wilderness* is an economic resource and subject of usage especially to local people, and *touristic wilderness* is a commercialised site for touristic activities. The idealised images of wilderness are associated with northern and eastern Finland.[44] When wolves are associated with wilderness, it is seen as *conserved*

41. Breitenmoser 1998, pp. 279–85; Fritts et al. 2003, p. 300.

42. Haapala 2007, pp. 50–59.

43. See Nash 1982 (1967); Coates 1998, pp. 10, 157, 177; Coleman 2004, pp. 135; Tonnaer 2020. Bill McKibben has written about the effects of peoples' actions on the rest of the nature in his book *The End of Nature* (1989). Recently, researchers in human sciences have used the concept of Anthropocene to describe human influence on Earth and its ecosystems. See Kress and Stine 2017.

44. Saarinen 2019.

wilderness, a notion that draws on the Western and Anglo-American views on wilderness and wild nature and is seen as a place without humans.

'Wolves do not need wilderness to thrive'

Even though the idea that wolves need wilderness still exists in Finland, it has been challenged by many Finns, at least since the late twentieth century. In 1972, a lone wolf living in the Tavastia region in southern Finland got plenty of media attention since wolves had not been observed in this area for a long time. Local nature conservation organisations defended the wolf's right to live there. In an opinion piece published in the newspaper *Hämeen Sanomat*, the organisations' representatives stated that 'although wolf is a predator, it is not a predator that could not live together with humans in the same landscape'.[45] *Suomen luonto* (1997) told its readers that wolves could permanently live near humans, not just visit human settlements occasionally, and even have dens in the cultural landscape.[46] Present-day wolf researchers state that wolves do not depend on wilderness areas; if allowed, they could thrive in areas densely populated by humans.[47] The cultural landscape is multispecies: as geographers Jennifer Wolch, Kathleen West and Thomas Graines remind us, even cities are not merely human, and many animals that are perceived as wildlife can live permanently or part-time in cities.[48]

Why was this behaviour, moving around human settlements and visiting urban areas, described again as 'normal' at the end of the twentieth century? I argue that how Finns viewed the wolf as a species played a vital role. During the twentieth century, cultural notions of wolves underwent significant changes. Environmental historian John McNeill has written about how wolves graduated from varmints to noble savages from 1960 to 1990 in the Western world.[49] This change also took place in Finland. Wolf conservation in Finland began in 1973, outside the reindeer herding area, which covers about 36 per cent of

45. 'Puheenvuoro: Hämeen suden puolesta', *Hämeen Sanomat* (written by Pentti Andsten from Kanta-Häme nature conservation association and Tuomo Raunistola from Luonto-Piiri) 30 Oct. 1972, p. 5.

46. Kojola 1997, pp. 157–58.

47. Mech 1995; Fritts et al 2003; Boitani 2003.

48. Wolch, West and Gaines 1995, pp. 736–37, 753. In many non-Western cities, wildlife is not seen as out-of-place.

49. McNeill 2001, p. 340. See also Mech 1995, p. 271.

the country's surface.[50] After this, wolves were seen as creatures with rights – for instance, the right to exist in Finland.[51] According to an opinion survey conducted in the late 1990s, some Finns in favour of wolf protection thought wolves should be protected even if living near humans.[52]

'Problem wolves' and the right to kill wolf individuals

I argue that the need to highlight the wolf's reputation as a wilderness species during the second part of the twentieth century was linked to justification of their killing. Before wolf conservation began in Finland in the 1970s, the wolf was classified as a harmful animal, and legislation encouraged people to hunt wolves down. The idea that the wolf is a wilderness species reinforced the already existing right to kill wolves upon meeting them, so there was no need to emphasise it. After wolves became a protected species, humans could no longer kill them as freely as before.[53] In the 1990s, when Finland became a member of the European Union, wolf conservation became stricter outside the reindeer herding area and more bureaucratic.[54] In order to kill a wolf legally, people needed to get special licence to make an exception to the protection. Also, one needed to justify the need to kill individual wolves that were under protection as a species.

Even though the species was protected, many Finns did not wish to share their living environment with wolves. In 1984, Matti Valtonen, the executive director of the Hunters' Central Organisation, stated in the magazine *Metsästys ja Kalastus* what many Finns thought – that no one wants a wolf in their backyard.[55] From the late twentieth century onward, newspapers often called wolves who visited peoples' yards *häirikkösusi*. The word is roughly translated as a troublemaker or nuisance wolf and is related to the English term

50. *Decree No. 749/1973 on Wolf Protection*.

51. Lähdesmäki 2020b.

52. Lumiaro 1997, p. 15.

53. The decree on wolf protection did not actually restrict the killing of wolves that much outside the reindeer herding area. It was possible to kill wolves legally during certain months in some of the Eastern municipalities, where most of the wolves existed during the 1970s and 1980s. It was also possible, under certain circumstances, to kill wolves elsewhere in Finland; for instance, if wolves caused damage or their numbers became too numerous. *Decree No. 749/1973 on Wolf Protection*.

54. *Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora*.

55. 'Suurpetomme lisääntyvät', *Metsästys ja Kalastus* 1/1984, p. 31

problem animal.[56] The concept of *häirikkösusi* was introduced in the 1980s. In 1982, Viljo Sivonen wrote in the hunting magazine *Metsästys ja Kalastus* about wolves that killed dogs while visiting peoples' yards. Sivonen was annoyed at this behaviour but also because the state did not compensate for the kills. In his article, he addressed the officials, lawmakers, game researchers and wolf conservationists: '[I]f you cannot help us through the law, then come and remove these troublemaker wolves from our midst next autumn. We are running out of means!'[57] In the 1990s, this term was used in abundance, for instance, in the country's biggest newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*.[58]

I argue that the concept of *häirikkösusi* was connected to the notion that wolves belong to the wilderness. It was, in a way, another way of saying that wolves that move about near humans are not normal. It was also a way to morally justify the human urge to keep wolves away from built-up areas, even by killing them. In the 1990s, some municipalities in eastern Finland applied for killing permits for wolves that had moved around human settlements.[59] Many Finns considered the killing of these so-called troublemaker wolves justifiable. Even some wolf conservationists and environmental organisations supported the killing of problem wolves.[60]

Conclusions

In this article, I have traced the history of the notion that wolves belong to the wilderness and shown how it is a relatively new and controversial idea in Finland. As the twentieth century progressed, the wolf became a symbol of the wilderness to many Finns, and their presence near humans changed from being criticised yet 'typical' and 'normal' to being seen as 'bold' and 'arrogant'

56. On problem animals, see Linnell et al. 1999, p. 698

57. Viljo Sivonen, 'Ilomantsin susisyksy 1981', *Metsästys ja Kalastus* 5/1982, p. 62.

58. In the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*, the term and its synonyms were used in six news reports written by journalists and in five opinion pieces. See, for instance, Ritva Liikkanen, 'Metsästyssäännöksiä ei aiota muuttaa', *Helsingin Sanomat* 22 Aug. 1997, p. A8; 'Susi ei ole häirikkö syntyessään', *Helsingin Sanomat* 13 Oct. 1997, p. A9 (opinion piece written by Timo Helle, chair of The Finnish Association for Nature Conservation, and Tuomas Rantanen, secretary-general of The Finnish Nature League).

59. See, for instance, 'Talon nurkissa kiertelevälle sudelle tappotuomio Nurmeksessa', *Helsingin Sanomat* 30 Jan. 1999, p. A5.

60. 'Paluu 1800-luvun petopolitiikkaan', *Helsingin Sanomat* 27 Jan. 1997, p. A9 (opinion piece written by Riku Lumiaro, Vantaa); 'Mika Parkkonen', 'Suojelijat eivät vastusta pihaan tulevan suden tappoa', *Helsingin Sanomat* 26 April 1997, p. A17.

behaviour. Cultural notions and their historical roots are important to examine because they have affected the lives of both people and wolves. If people have perceived wolves to be out of place, it has historically resulted in wolves being chased or killed.

Wolves were associated with wilderness partly because Finns did not want to share their living spaces with wolves. There were many reasons for that, mainly related to the fact that, as historian Jon T. Coleman puts it, wolves and humans have competed for space and calories. When moving about near humans, wolves have had access to domestic animals. Coleman writes about wolves' history in America, where European-Americans understood livestock as their property.[61] Finns have felt similarly. Also, the possibility that wolves could harm humans has made them unwanted and feared visitors in the cultural landscape.[62]

Interestingly, the connection between wolves and the wilderness was also made because some Finns believed that wolves need wilderness areas to thrive, that it was essential for them to live far away from humans and population centres. As I wrote earlier, according to present-day wolf researchers, this notion is a misconception. Still, wolves are more threatened in open terrain and areas highly developed and used by humans. Also, the absence of humans in the wolves' habitat is an essential factor for wolves to thrive.[63] For wolves, wilderness-like areas would therefore be advantageous, but paradoxically, at the same time as the idea that the wolf is a wilderness species strengthened, the Finnish environment underwent changes that meant that the areas that could be called wilderness became fewer. As I write earlier, environmental historians have brought light to the fact that people have shaped the shared landscape so that there are practically no places left for wolves to be completely isolated from human influences in Finland and elsewhere.

Wolf conservation that began in the 1970s has made it possible for wolves to proliferate, form packs and spread out into old territories in Finland. As I related at the beginning of this chapter, not all Finns have welcomed them. It has been difficult for many to co-exist with wolves. Compared to many other European countries, the Finnish wolf population is relatively small: the estimate number of wolves living in Finland was under 300 individuals in March 2022.[64] Strict conservation has worsened disputes between interest

61. Coleman 2004, pp. 35–36.

62. See for instance, Lähdesmäki 2020a; Lähdesmäki 2020b.

63. Mech 1995; Breitenmoser 1998, pp. 281–82; Barber-Meyer et al. 2021.

64. *Suomen susikannan painopiste yhä enemmän lännessä.*

groups and politicised wolves' presence in the Finnish landscape.[65] In previous decades, wolves have returned to many European countries after shorter or longer periods of absence. Therefore, Finns are not alone in debating whether wolves belong to the cultural landscape or to the imagined or real wilderness. For instance, in Finland's neighbouring countries Norway and Sweden, where recovering wolf populations are nowadays protected, many people believe that wolves do not belong to cultural landscape or that their numbers should be kept minimal there.[66] In Russia, where the species is not protected, the general attitude toward wolves is more negative, and many Russians view the wolf as a competitor.[67] Wolves' presence creates heated debates in Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and Germany too. As Michaela Fenske and Bernhard Tschofen point out, '[w]olves are a keystone species that exemplify humanity's relation to what is called nature and their return generates powerful debates about what nature actually is and how much it is needed or should be permitted to exist'.[68] In order to live in a multispecies world, we need to try to understand wolf and other wildlife debates. To do so, we need to know the histories of the ways we have perceived animal places.

65. Lähdesmäki 2020b; Ratamäki 2009.

66. Sjölander-Lindqvist 2009; Figari and Skogen 2011.

67. Kirilyuk 2020.

68. Fenske and Tschofen 2020, p. i. On the return of wolves in many European countries, Michaela Fenske and Bernhard Tschofen (eds), *Managing the Return of the Wild. Human Encounters with Wolves in Europe*.

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