

## 4. Wolf Atmospheres

---

### Wolf atmospheres and the ecology of fear

In the last chapter, I told the story of the wolves' return to the Westerwald in order to show how the coexistence of wolves and humans entangles both in affective arrangements. In particular, I was interested in tracing how wolves 'make things happen', both in terms of affects (presences and traces) and effects (material), and thus become visible as affective actors in the web of these arrangements. In doing so, I have drawn on the most basic definition of affect as a vital force that sets things in motion. We have also seen how these vital forces condense into ever denser presences, or fade away again, to eventually pass away. In this chapter, I further explore how certain affective dynamics can condense into a particular affective arrangement, which I call *wolfatmosphere*.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas my previous remarks on wolf agency were primarily concerned with wolfish actions and how they affect humans, the focus on atmospheres attempts to clarify the *felt* affective forces of wolves on their human and non-human co-inhabitants. An atmosphere is understood here as a precarious, dynamic, affectively charged structure that emanates from wolves, envelops their territory and thereby also emotionally colours the lives of the people who live there. But wolves are not the sole producers of atmospheres. Rather, their affective lives assemble a variety of elements (each with its own affective power) in an arrangement that includes other beings, materials, and material objects, as

---

1 See Lorimer, Jamie/Hodgetts, Timothy/Barua, Maan: 'Animals' atmospheres', in: *Progress in Human Geography* 43.1 (2019), pp. 26–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132517731254>; Keil, Paul: 'Rank Atmospheres: The more-than-human scentspace and aesthetic of a pigdogging hunt', in: *Australian Journal of Anthropology* (2021), pp. 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1111/taja.12382>.

well as landscapes. As an “indeterminate, spatially effused quality of feeling”,<sup>2</sup> atmospheres offer a way of thinking about how subjective emotional experiences emerge from larger intersubjective affective structures.

It is wolf atmospheres that wolf friends allude to when they talk about the thrill of being in a wolf territory and having the chance to meet wolves ‘for real’; when wives of local councillors talk about being too scared to go into a wolf territory; when shepherds describe the distressed feeling of their flock after a wolf attack; when hunters try to find words for the queasy feeling they have when walking through a wolf territory with a freshly killed deer; when they talk about wild boars gathering in ever larger sounders out of fear; when they claim that it is only a matter of time before something happens; or, on the most general level, when people in the countryside talk about how they now have to live in fear now and how their whole lives have been changed by the mere presence of wolves.

Studying the lives of animals through their atmospheres may at first seem unusual. The field of human-animal studies became aware of this in the course of the affective turn in the humanities and social sciences. But natural scientists have also been concerned with the affective forces of animals, albeit not under the heading of ‘atmosphere’. In behavioural ecology, researchers began to distinguish between ‘lethal’ and ‘non-lethal’ effects of predators on prey.<sup>3</sup> For decades, ecologists have studied the role of predators in regulating ecological systems. Predators are said to have ‘density-mediating effects’, meaning that they influence the mortality rate and thus the population size of the prey species. Ecosystems are thought to be regulated *top-down* by trophic levels. However, another approach argues that primary production and its effects on herbivores regulate ecosystems *bottom-up*, with predators having no significant influence. Recent studies further complicate ecological modelling by suggesting that top-down and bottom-up regulatory systems are intertwined and may overlap. So, the role of predators in the ecosystem is still a mystery.<sup>4</sup>

To complicate matters further, ecologists now also recognise non-lethal (behavioural) effects of prey predators on prey. The (not uncontroversial) hy-

---

2 Böhme, Gernot: *Atmosphären. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 2013, p. 27, translated by TG.

3 For overviews of wolf-prey relations in general, see Mech, David/Peterson, R.: *Wolf-prey relations*; ; D. Mech/D. Smith/D. MacNulty: *Wolves on the Hunt*.

4 See Heurich, Marco: *Die Rolle der großen Beutegreifer im Ökosystem*, in: Ders. (ed.), *Wolf, Luchs und Bär in der Kulturlandschaft*, pp. 71–94.

pothesis here is that the mere presence of a prey predator has an effect (in the terminology of this book: affect) on prey animals in the environment. They live in an 'ecology of fear'.<sup>5</sup> Prey animals are thought to live a life in constant fear of becoming prey, to be constantly alert and on the lookout for predators, to avoid areas of high risk or spend little time there, to seek out areas of low risk or congregate in larger groups. In this model, fear is an existential emotion that keeps them alert and therefore alive. It permeates their environment and transforms it into 'landscapes of fear'.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, this behavioural ecology of the predator-prey relationships has been studied primarily in wolves. Several studies using wolves of Yellowstone National Park in the United States have investigated how prey species such as wapiti deer respond to the presence of wolves.<sup>7</sup> However, the results seem inconclusive in terms of clear top-down effects. Wolves and their prey do not appear to follow a standard behavioural protocol, but instead exhibit a variety of responses and behaviours. Studies of wolves in central Europe are sparse and similarly inconclusive.<sup>8</sup> There is also evidence that fear of humans overshadows fear of wolves in prey animals.<sup>9</sup> Finally, a study in Germany found

- 
- 5 Brown, Joel S./Laundré, John W./Gurung, Mahesh: 'The ecology of fear: optimal foraging, game theory, and trophic interactions', in: *Journal of Mammalogy* 80.2 (1999), pp. 385–399, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1383287>.
  - 6 Laundré, John W./Hernández, Lucina/Altendorf, Kelly B.: 'Wolves, elk, and bison: re-establishing the 'landscape of fear' in Yellowstone National Park, U.S.A.', in: *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 79.8 (2001), pp. 1401–1409, <https://doi.org/10.1139/z01-094>.
  - 7 Ibid; Creel, Scott et al.: 'Elk Alter Habitat Selection as an Antipredator Response to Wolves', in: *Ecology* 86.12 (2005), pp. 3387–3397, <https://doi.org/10.1890/05-0032>; White, P.J./Proffitt, Kelly M./Lemke, Thomas O.: 'Changes in Elk Distribution and Group Sizes after Wolf Restoration', in: *The American Midland Naturalist* 167.1 (2012), pp. 174–187, <https://doi.org/10.1674/0003-0031-167.1.174>.
  - 8 Kuijper, Dries P. et al.: 'Landscape of fear in Europe: Wolves affect spatial patterns of ungulate browsing in Białowieża Primeval Forest, Poland', in: *Ecography* 36.12 (2013), pp. 1263–1275, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0587.2013.00266.x>; Kuijper, Dries P. et al.: 'Context dependence of risk effects: Wolves and tree logs create patches of fear in an old-growth forest', in: *Behavioral Ecology* 26.6 (2015), pp. 1558–1568, <https://doi.org/10.1093/beheco/arv107>; Theuerkauf, Jörn/Rouys, Sophie: 'Habitat selection by ungulates in relation to predation risk by wolves and humans in the Białowieża Forest, Poland', in: *Forest Ecology and Management* 256.6 (2008), pp. 1325–1332, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foreco.2008.06.030>.
  - 9 Zbyryt Adam et al.: 'Do wild ungulates experience higher stress with humans than with large carnivores?', in: *Behavioral Ecology* 29.1 (2018), pp. 19–30, <https://doi.org/10.1093/beheco/arx142>.

that wolves themselves show signs of fear of humans, as they seem to avoid roads and other anthropogenic structures in the landscape.<sup>10</sup>

As we can see, a broader view of an ecology of fear can operate in several dimensions: from animal predator to animal prey, from human predator to animal prey-predator (wolves), from human predator to animal prey (deer) and perhaps even from animal predator (wolves) to human prey.<sup>11</sup> This last dimension in particular is often used by those who are sceptical about wolves (see Chapter 5). Although there has not been a single incident of human harm in Germany since the return of wolves, some people seem to be alarmed or at least unsettled by the sheer possibility.<sup>12</sup> And wherever wolves appear, wolf sceptics claim that they turn the place into what could be called a landscape of fear.

In this chapter, I examine in detail one of the most prominent examples of such a landscape of fear, using the concept of animal atmosphere to unravel the complexity of the socio-ecological relationships involved. How can the wolf atmosphere be described? What emotions are involved? What or who contributes to the atmosphere? Is it stable or dynamic? If it is dynamic, what influences its transformations and intensities?

We are investigating these questions in the municipality of Ralbitz-Rosenthal in Saxony, home to the Rosenthal Pack,<sup>13</sup> which is led by a female named Marie. Ralbitz-Rosenthal consists of ten villages with about 1750 inhabitants in rural Lusatia. The majority of the inhabitants are Germans with a (Catholic)

---

10 Reinhardt, Ilka/Kluth, Gesa: Untersuchungen zum Raum-Zeitverhalten und zur Abwanderung von Wölfen in Sachsen. Final report project 'Wanderwolf' (2012–2014), commissioned by the Saxon State Ministry for the Environment and Agriculture (SMUL), 2015.

11 J. Soentgen: Ökologie der Angst.

12 See the classic review of wolf attacks on humans compiled by Linnell, John et al: The fear of wolves: A review of wolf attacks on humans, NINA Oppdragsmelding 731, Trondheim: Norsk institutt for naturforskning 2002, <https://www.nina.no/archive/nina/ppbasepdf/opdragsmelding/731.pdf> (accessed 30.04.2024) or the new edition Linnell, John D./Kovtun, Ekaterina/Rouart, Ive: Wolf attacks on humans: an update for 2002–2020.pdf (accessed: 30.04.2024) or the new edition Linnell, John D./Kovtun, Ekaterina/Rouart, Ive: Wolf attacks on humans: an update for 2002–2020. NINA Report 1944. Trondheim: Norwegian Institute for Nature Research 2021, <https://brage.nina.no/nina-xmlui/handle/11250/2729772> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

13 The "exceptional wolves of Rosenthal", as one of the most popular German hunting magazines, *Jäger* (25.09.2015), called them, <https://www.jaegermagazin.de/jagd-aktuell/woelfe-in-deutschland/die-ausnahmewoelfe-von-rosenthal/> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

Serbian identity (a long-established Slavic minority that has lived in this region for more than a thousand years). Like much of Lusatia, few people work in agriculture these days, instead earning their living in nearby urban centres and the energy industry. In general, however, Rosenthal can be described as a fairly prosperous community with a strong rural identity. It has become known both in the region and throughout Germany as a hotspot of anti-wolf activism and for a wolf pack that has probably killed more sheep than any other pack in Germany. So, it is an extreme and illustrative example, but hardly a typical one. Nevertheless, the Rosenthal case shows us aspects of wolf atmospheres that are regularly found elsewhere, albeit less intensively.

The purpose of this chapter is also to look more closely at wolf sceptics, their arguments and their experiences. Here we immerse ourselves in the lifeworld and worldview of people critical of wolves and try to perceive and understand human-wolf conflicts from their perspective. The story of Rosenthal and the Rosenthal Pack presented here can therefore be read as a particular narrative construction of events and experiences that aims to explore above all the affective dimensions of the conflict. However, this story does not simply repeat the views of the local activists; it also introduces other views that confront, challenge, or contradict their views, thus creating a multi-voiced ethnographic account that pays attention not only to the human-wolf dimension of the conflict, but also to social conflicts. In other words, one could also say that here I consider both conflicts with wolves and conflicts about wolves equally.

However, for the sake of understanding the wolf-critical lifeworld, I also leave out things that are important for a public debate about that very lifeworld. For example, I leave out the question of whether the concerns and fears expressed are in any way 'justified', the dangers 'probable', the proposed solutions 'feasible'. I also leave out the question of whether the views of the wolf critics are representative of 'the people of Rosenthal' or 'the people of Lusatia'. The petition they initiated, which was signed by more than 16,000 people, most of them from Rosenthal and Lusatia in general, suggests that the wolf critics speak for many people in and around Rosenthal. But it is impossible to judge whether those who signed wanted to send a signal against the wolves or in solidarity with the shepherds, who are their neighbours, relatives, and acquaintances. Be that as it may, many questions of representation remain: Who represents whom, for what and with what means?

*Figure 16: The female wolf Marie/FT7*



Source: André Klingenberger

*Figure 17: The Rosenthal Pack*



Source: André Klingenberger

## Rosenthal, Lusatia: a landscape of fear?

*Figure 18: Sheep on a pasture in Rosenthal the day after a wolf attack*



Source: Author

As part of a study on space use and movement patterns of wolves,<sup>14</sup> a one-year-old female wolf from the Milkel Pack, hereafter called FT7, GW112f or Marie, was captured in May 2012 and tagged with a GPS transmitting collar. Weighing only 27 kilograms, the researchers described her as small and delicate. Although she was quite mature, Marie preferred to stay with her parent pack during her second year of life, only occasionally venturing out of her territory for a day to explore the world outside. In 2013—aged around 22 months—she was still with her pack and must have become pregnant. But there was no sign of her offspring, so it was thought that her first cubs had not survived.

A short time later, however, Marie appeared to have taken the step of moving away from her family and establishing her own territory, bordering her original territory to the southwest. She had found a partner who came over from Poland (GW294m) and settled in the Rosenthal area. Why there? A resident of Rosenthal commented:

14 I. Reinhardt/G. Kluth: Untersuchungen zum Raum-Zeitverhalten und zur Abwanderung von Wölfen in Sachsen.

[ROSENTHAL ACTIVIST:] These are all the meadows of the monastery, all along the Klosterwasser stream, from the village of Panschwitz down, which were leased. This was paradise on earth for the wolves, of course. At that time, in 2013, when the Rosenthal Pack arrived here, there were four large flocks of sheep, really large flocks of sheep [...].

[INTERVIEWER:] So several hundred [sheep]?

[ROSENTHAL ACTIVIST:] Exactly, he [the wolf] didn't need to go to the forest anymore, he had everything here and it was like paradise.<sup>15</sup>

Marie continued to visit her parents until her collar fell off prematurely in November 2013. The following year, Marie gave birth to five pups and the Rosenthal Pack was born. By this time, the wolves were already attracting attention. They attacked local sheep flocks six times in 2013 (officially classified as three C1 and three C3) and seventeen times in 2014 (six C1 and eleven C3).<sup>16</sup> Marie probably knew sheep as prey from her first two years in the Milkel Pack (which was responsible for seven attacks in 2012 and six in 2011 after her birth in May).

For the local shepherds and residents, this was a worrying new situation that soon caused problems:

[ROSENTHAL ACTIVIST:] X [a local shepherd] had previously secured everything with a solid fence, even before the wolves came, and he thought that would work and, well, maybe they learned there, I don't know, they all learned there, the wolves and the shepherds. But then it went blow by blow, which quickly led to a huge resentment. People, it wasn't just the people affected, but the whole population took part [in the resentment] because we had all seen, heard, and read about it, and then it was sold to us as a situation that we had to get used to. This is unacceptable [...].

[ROSENTHAL ACTIVIST:] ... [We were told that] Saxony would manage with five or six packs. That would be possible and then we'll see. But then it

---

15 Interview, Rosenthal activist, 04.08.2020.

16 Marie's first attempts to attack sheep involved breaching a chain-link fence, climbing over it the first time (100 cm) and digging under it the second time. In 2014, she noticed and killed sheep tied with chains six times. In GDR times, it was common for people to keep one or two sheep for meat. These were usually chained to a post next to the house. This practice can still be found sporadically in Lusatia, also in the wolf area.

got really dynamic. Then there were twelve, then eighteen, and when the question was asked, how many packs will we have in Saxony at some point, what is the goal, nobody gave us an answer.<sup>17</sup>

The wolf atmosphere of Rosenthal thus began with a cascade of violent interventions by Marie and her pack into the affective fabric of a local lifeworld—the domestic sphere where everyday life is lived, where routines give shape to a *Heimat* ('home') to which people belong, a place that is known, trusted, and feels familiar, an extension of one's self, family, and relationships. This lifeworld is their *home*, an area that local people have shaped over the centuries into a cultural landscape of their own order and control. It is a species-rich landscape where domesticated farm animals have their place alongside their human owners and wild animals live in the surrounding forests under the stewardship of local hunters. The romantic vein of this German concept of *Heimat* is obvious, as are the idyllic undertones that evoke a certain social aesthetic.<sup>18</sup> In other words, although the concept of *Heimat* can be understood as part of people's worldview, in the context of wolf atmospheres we should better understand it as a certain place-based attitude to life, *a felt quality of existence and a sense of place*. What wolves violate in the eyes of wolf critics is this sense of home, which should be a safe place and should also feel 'homey'.

Marie's intrusion was experienced all the more violently as it went "blow by blow". One resident spoke in this context of the *Schlagzahl* ('stroke count') of the attacks, a term normally used in reference to the rhythm of machines. With each attack, the wolves established themselves step by step and became part of this local lifeworld, which was transformed into a wolf territory—whether the people wanted it or not. The *Heimat* became 'wolfish', as people had to adjust to hitherto unknown and unfamiliar feelings caused by the wolf presence. In contrast to the situation in the Westerwald described in Chapter 3, the people of Rosenthal experienced several years of continuous wolf incidents in their immediate vicinity. As one of the local activists said, they were all in a fix together, not just the shepherds, but all the locals, as both the affective impact and the material consequences were felt by all. As Rosenthal is also a close-knit community, everyone was affected in some way by the wolf attacks and could easily sympathise with the shepherds. Whereas in the Westerwald it was possible to

17 Interview, Rosenthal activist and hunter, 04.08.2020.

18 On the concept of social aesthetics, see MacDougall, David: *The Corporeal Image. Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*, Princeton University Press 2005.

ignore the various wolf presences if one wished to do so, in Rosenthal it was almost impossible to escape from one's lifeworld-turned-wolf territory.

At the centre of this territory were the sheep and their pastures—many of them around the villages. A wolf atmosphere could only develop at this early stage because Rosenthal was a multispecies lifeworld in which sheep formed the nexus for both the human-sheep relationship and the wolf-sheep relationship. And both relationships are ultimately about the death of sheep, as they are primarily a source of food for both humans and wolves. However, there are significant atmospheric differences in the quality of death. The killing of sheep by humans is an orderly affair, it occurs in appropriate places at pre-planned times, it is brought about by professionals, performed using technology, and leads (ideally) to a clean and certain, and thus presumably painless, death.<sup>19</sup> In a way, then, it could be argued that this kind of orderly killing of sheep does not necessarily disrupt the social aesthetics of the home with its familiar sensibilities. But wolf kills are different, as this young woman from Rosenthal told me:

Well, I haven't actually seen a wolf kill sheep, but a dead sheep, yes, here in Rosenthal [...] well, I know that from Dad, he's a hunter, I know it when an animal is dead. But it's different again if it was from a wolf, when parts are missing, just torn out, that's somehow different [...].<sup>20</sup>

One could argue then that in contrast to human 'virtuous' hunters, wolves are experienced here as 'vicious' hunters: hunting without a moral code, and with cruel results.<sup>21</sup> An animal killed by a wolf is not called a *Riss* ('rip' or 'tear' in German for no reason. The word refers to the wolf's method of hunting, killing and eating, which is characterised not only by a suffocating bite to the throat, but also by tearing open the abdomen and ripping pieces of flesh or a leg from the animal's body. As one shepherd put it, a wolf kill site can look like the scene of a bomb blast, with body parts lying all over the place. Wounded animals with their bellies ripped open, intestines hanging out, or pieces of flesh torn out are also familiar sights to affected shepherds (including in Rosenthal). This is

---

19 Marvin, Garry: 'Wild Killing: Contesting the Animal in Hunting', in: The Animal Studies Group (ed.), *Killing Animals*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press 2006.

20 Interview, Rosenthal activist, 04.08.2020.

21 This is a distinction made by Plato originally, cited in Scruton, Roger: *The Sacred Pursuit: Reflections on the Literature on Hunting*, in: Nathan Kowalsky (ed). *Hunting Philosophy for Everyone: In Search of the Wild Life*, Oxford: Blackwells 2010, pp. 187–197.

what I call the *necroaesthetics* of a wolf kill, a particular multisensory, visceral, material and atmospheric experience of human observers in the presence of death.

All this may be a natural way for a predator to kill. But compared to the social aesthetics of everyday life in Rosenthal, where one can easily ignore the deaths of animals, or at least be sure that everything is going according to a pre-conceived and ethically convincing plan, the necroaesthetics of the *Risse* seems like a shock, *an affective rupture of local sensibilities*. Not only do the wolves make the deaths of animals visible and public, but they do so in places normally reserved for everyday routine activities such as walking, playing, and meeting people. *Risse* also come suddenly and unexpectedly. Since wolves usually hunt at night or at dusk, humans hardly ever have the chance to witness the actual act of killing. It is the *affective traces*, the material and atmospheric results of a kill that can then be found and affect those present. These material remains (sometimes together with what appear to us to be cruelly injured animals) are often anything but the result of a 'proper' killing. *Risse* are *hot kills*, expressions of an *affective wildness* that does not belong to the habitual lifeworld of humans and can be experienced as highly disturbing as they seem 'out of control'.

The affective power of *Risse* and the atmosphere they evoke must therefore be seen as informed by wider cultural sensibilities and practices around the killing of animals. As Garry Marvin has pointed out, the killing of animals has largely disappeared from view, making it easier to ignore animal suffering, pain, and death, especially as both the keeping and killing of animals has become mechanised and industrialised.<sup>22</sup> Even in the countryside, as in Lusatia, but also in other regions of Germany, the death of animals has long since ceased to be part of people's lifeworld. It is not only the average urban population, which is supposedly alienated from nature (as wolf sceptics often claim), that has hardly any experience with the death of animals. The same is true for most rural people who—apart from hunters and farmers—generally have little to do with the killing of animals. Against this background, the question of the 'naturalness' of a killing becomes an issue and can lead to a necroaesthetic that some find shocking, disturbing, and threatening.

\*\*\*

---

22 Marvin, Garry: *Wild Killing*, pp. 10–29.

By the 2013–14 monitoring year, there were ten packs in Saxony, and the first forms of resistance were already being organised. Hunters were the first to protest against the return of the wolves. The Saxon state government tried to appease them by officially declaring the wolf a (hunnable) game species in 2011 (albeit with a year-round closed season, as it remained under nature conservation protection). But this change in the law gave hunters—at least in theory—some say in wolf matters, especially to be involved in wolf monitoring and to initiate cooperation between wolf management and hunters. The Saxon State Hunting Association (LJV) appeared to be placated at this point and its protests against wolves dwindled. However, a group of around sixty hunters split from the LJV to form the *Freie Jägerschaft Wittichenau*, which has since taken a more radical stance against wolves. Shortly after the split, the LJV Saxony also stepped up its opposition to the wolf again, and its Wolf Action Group, led by the LJV's Wolf Commissioner, launched a petition, “Our native wildlife asks for your help”, which collected around 9,000 signatures.

This petition followed directly on from the first petition organised by shepherds, “Shepherds ask for help”, which ran from September 2012 to January 2013 and also gathered almost 9000 signatures. It drew attention to the shepherds' existential fears and their new financial burdens and called for regulated wolf hunting. Although all these previous forms of protest did not seem to have any immediate impact on the wolf management, they did contribute to a steadily heating up debate, which culminated in two applications for the ‘lethal removal’ of wolves from the Rosenthal Pack by the *Landrat* (district councillor) of Bautzen in 2016. Both applications were rejected.<sup>23</sup> Hunters and anti-wolf activists became increasingly frustrated and refused to cooperate with the wolf management regime.

After another sixteen (eight C1 and eight C3) attacks on livestock by the Rosenthal Pack in 2015 and eleven (nine C1 and two C3) in 2016, the local population became increasingly angry. The district administration organised a wolf symposium in Cunnewitz to address local protests, but the event further escalated the situation. Local activists recall how condescendingly they were treated by the ‘wolf managers’ that day, and how the event was ‘infiltrated’ by wolf advocates who tried to stifle any negative comments about wolves and booed anyone who reported the ‘facts’ of the Rosenthal Pack's attacks. So,

---

23 “Vorerst kein Wolfs-Abschuss”, in: Sächsische.de from 18.10.2017, <https://www.saechsische.de/vorerst-kein-wolfs-abschuss-3797820.html> (accessed: 18.06.2022, no longer available).

a group of local hunters decided to launch a new petition to intensify their protest. This time they collected more than 16,000 signatures and delivered the petition to the Saxon parliament in January 2018.

Previously, in October 2017, after two wolf attacks on sheep flocks near Laske and Cunnewitz and at the official request of the Landrat, the Saxon Ministry for the Environment and Agriculture (SMUL) had finally granted permission to shoot a wolf from the Rosenthal Pack:

One or more wolves have apparently learnt in recent weeks to overcome the recommended protective measures (electric fence and flutter tape) that are reasonable for the sheep farmers. This means that the conditions are now in place for the wolf to be removed. In order to avert further major economic damage, the removal of the wolves is justified and necessary, despite the strict protection of wolves that still exists in principle, as there are no other alternatives for the protection of livestock that are reasonable for livestock farmers.<sup>24</sup>

Conservationists were furious at the decision. The *Grüne Liga Sachsen* (a coalition of several conservation organisations) and the animal rights activists of *Wolfsschutz Deutschland e.V.* were successful in an urgent appeal against the permit. In addition, activists from *Wolfsschutz Deutschland* came to Rosenthal from all over Germany to check that the fencing was correct and to hold 'night watches' to protect the pack.<sup>25</sup> As one local hunter/activist described it:

I remember very well when we had all these attacks two years ago, militant wolf protectors came here, I think one came from Frankfurt and others from Hamburg, and then they drove around here in their cars, drove around with torches, lit up the meadows and brought a lot of unrest. Some of them walked through Ralbitz with posters, trying to provoke the residents. But they weren't provoked. [...] It was all very strange. And a great anecdote was that X [a local shepherd] had his sheep up here in a meadow, there was a paddock, and the flock had not been there for two days, and the wolf protectors

24 "Staatsministerium für Umwelt und Landwirtschaft erteilt Einvernehmen zur Ausnahmegenehmigung des Landratsamtes Bautzen zur Entnahme eines Wolfes", press release of SMUL/Landkreis Bautzen, 27.10.2017, <https://www.medienservice.sachsen.de/medien/news/214194> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

25 "Große Exklusivreportage: Faktencheck und Zaunkontrollen in Sachsen", *Wolfsschutz Deutschland e.V.*, 02.07.2021, <https://wolfsschutz-deutschland.de/tag/rosenthaler-ru-del/> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

went to these fences, touched them and said that there was no electricity on them, so the wolves could jump in. And they didn't say that the sheep were no longer there, that they were in another paddock. Then they took a nice photo. We all just grinned [...].<sup>26</sup>

But the wolf advocates were certain that the local shepherds had not fenced their pastures properly, and suspected that they were deliberately attracting the wolves to an “unacceptable fast-food offer”. And they were not alone in this opinion. I had often heard this suspicion expressed by wolf advocates in the region, that the Rosenthal shepherds were provoking the removal of the pack. Even the SMUL admitted in its press release that the reasons for the wolves' success in killing sheep in Rosenthal was at least partly due to the inadequacy of the fences:

Why did the wolves in the area of the Rosenthal Pack behave differently? The situation of the Rosenthal Pack differs from other packs in that these wolves were repeatedly able to prey on unprotected sheep (tethered) or on sheep that were not protected as recommended (behind fixed fences). This has resulted in a learning effect which has led to repeated killing of protected animals.<sup>27</sup>

Following the rejection of an application for the lethal removal of a wolf, four regional organisations joined forces and wrote the ‘Bautzen Declaration’<sup>28</sup> to the Saxon parliament.<sup>29</sup> The association *Sicherheit und Artenschutz*, the *Initiative Wolfsgeschädigter und besorgte Bürger*, the *Freie Jägerschaft Wittichenau* and the *LJV Sachsen*<sup>30</sup> declared Saxony's wolf management a failure. They demanded,

---

26 Interview, Rosenthal Activist/Hunter, 04.08.2020.

27 “Staatsministerium für Umwelt und Landwirtschaft erteilt Einvernehmen zur Ausnahmegenehmigung des Landratsamtes Bautzen zur Entnahme eines Wolfes”, press release of SMUL/Landkreis Bautzen, 27.10.2017, <https://www.medienservice.sachsen.de/medien/news/214194> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

28 <http://woelfeindeutschland.de/aus-der-gruft-die-bautzener-erklaerung/> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

29 The initiative was mainly due to the four people who head these organisations. All of them are hunters and at least three of them have been actively campaigning against wolves for several years.

30 According to the late wildlife biologist and wolf expert Ulrich Wotschikowsky, the ‘Bautzen Declaration’ was signed by the LJV President without prior consultation, which (among other reasons) led to the resignation of the President a few weeks af-

among other things, that wolf management be replaced by a more comprehensive wildlife management (led by hunters), that wolves be hunted, and that wolves only be allowed only in designated wolf areas. And although the statement had received some media attention, there was no reaction from Parliament.

It is clear from these episodes that wolf atmospheres and their dynamics need to be disentangled, for they are neither monolithic nor stable, but complex, fragile, ambivalent and constantly evolving. Although I have spoken of a wolf atmosphere as an atmosphere that develops around wolves, the wolves are not the only actors contributing to it. We have seen above how the particular necroaesthetics of wolf kills are central to understanding conflicts with wolves in Rosenthal. However, we must not forget the many other human actors involved in social conflicts over wolves. In Rosenthal, an ongoing conflict with wolves is the driving force. However, I argue that conflicts with wolves have a tendency to shift to social conflicts about wolves because local people are limited and regulated in their ability to engage directly with legally protected wolves. They are allowed to engage indirectly (e.g. through improved fencing) but not directly (e.g. by chasing or hunting wolves). In terms of the affective qualities of the wolf atmosphere, this means that the wolf atmosphere is fed not only by the irritation of people's sense of home through feelings of shock, horror and threat, but also by a sense of powerlessness among local people – of being unable to act and react, of not being in control, of lacking self-efficacy in the face of the wolf.

These feelings are accompanied at the same time by anger at those who are held responsible for their powerlessness: the wolf management regime as a whole and its supporters. This shifts the human-wolf conflict into a social conflict between humans, and thus takes on additional dimensions. To use a Gestalt metaphor<sup>31</sup>, the Rosenthal Pack continues to sting by attacking in the

---

ter the declaration became known. The wolf had caused controversy in the LJV for years. See Ulrich Wotschikowsky, "Aus der Gruft: die Bautzener Erklärung—aktualisiert", *Wolfsite*. Forum Isegrim, 16.02.2018. <http://woelfeindeutschland.de/aus-der-gruft-die-bautzener-erklaerung/> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

31 What is meant here is the concept of gestalt from the gestalt-theoretical psychology of perception, according to which the visual field is divided into a figure (object), a foreground and a background. The recognition of an object here is not the perception of an isolated figure, but of an overall context of a figure in front of a background, i.e. an organised gestalt.

background, while the humans turn their attention to other, human figures in the foreground, engaging in social arenas far removed from the immediacy of their now shared human-wolf lifeworlds at home. Indeed, the engagement of locals in wolf affairs is characterised by a constant shift between foreground and background events and actors, giving the dynamics of the wolf atmosphere an axis around which it can continue to revolve.

This *atmospheric axis* can be further differentiated along two human dimensions, one vertical and one horizontal. The vertical axis refers to conflicts upwards within a social hierarchy. Local people are confronted with the main actors and institutions of wolf management such as the state parliament, ministries, non-governmental institutions such as the Senckenberg Institute (for genetic research), and intermediaries such as regional politicians. The great imbalance of power vis-à-vis these actors fosters the above-mentioned feelings of incapacitation, helplessness, and powerlessness, combined with anger. This constellation of feelings is further confronted by affective interventions from a horizontal axis: other actors within civil society, mainly pro-wolf organisations such as the *Grüne Liga Sachsen* or *Wolfsschutz Deutschland*. These pro-wolf organisations are not officially part of the wolf management regime, but wolf critics consider them to be ‘in league’ with the regime, as they presumably share the same value of wolf conservation.<sup>32</sup>

The affective qualities of the conflict along the two axes are different. Apart from mediating figures such as the wolf kill assessor, the institutionalised wolf management regime seems far removed from the local lifeworld and faceless; there is no clear target of anger, only a general direction. The pro-wolf organisations, on the other hand, are usually perceived as citizens like themselves; local people become aware of them not only through court cases but also through local events such as the one in Cunnewitz or the activities of *Wolfsschutz Deutschland* in Rosenthal. When they talk about public events, wolf critics in Rosenthal (but also elsewhere) are usually less upset about the treatment of management representatives than about the heated arguments with wolf advocates. While management representatives are usually seen as one-sided, but at least quite rational and moderate in their arguments, wolf

---

32 I have also often encountered confusion among wolf sceptics who mistakenly assumed that some nature conservation organisation is part of wolf management. This distinction seems to be irrelevant in their eyes, as both wolf management institutions and conservation organisations are supposedly working towards similar goals, the reintroduction of wolves to Germany.

advocates are seen as highly emotional, irrational and radical in their aims. While it is possible to try to negotiate with official management (e.g. through petitions and requests for lethal removal), it seems impossible to reach an agreement with *Wolfskuschler* (wolf cuddlers), as wolf advocates are often called in wolf-critical circles.

Finally, the early episodes of events in Rosenthal also show how the dynamics of wolf atmospheres oscillate between consolidation and disintegration. In order to motivate local people to remain engaged in protest, it is not only necessary to have continuous wolf attacks, but also a reasonably stable social organisation of protest. Initially, local people joined forces with anti-wolf movements in other parts of Saxony. It is important to note that both early petitions were embedded in already existing organisations and networks of individual interest groups (of shepherds and hunters). The issue of wolves could thus be linked to other issues of these interest groups and their problems and challenges in today's society. In this way, conflicts with wolves can be linked to conflicts about wolves.

As well as taking part in national protests, anti-wolf activists in Rosenthal have tried to organise local forms of protest, whether by setting up a new hunting association, launching a new petition, or demanding the lethal removal of wolves from the Rosenthal Pack. Although conflicts over wolves and other issues are often presented as expressions of social struggles, such as the perceived opposition between rural and urban areas, the local protests always revolved around Marie and the Rosenthal Pack in particular. This then led to demands for a review of wolf management in general, but always with the view that such a review should change the wolf situation in the immediate lifeworld of Rosenthal and the neighbouring communities.

We can therefore conclude that the temporal stability and consolidation of the wolf atmosphere in Rosenthal depended on the continuous renewal of a certain affective arrangement through a series of wolf attacks and the formation of organised protest. The wolf atmosphere fed off these formations, motivating people's engagement, and they in turn brought new affective qualities to the wolf atmosphere centred on the conflict with the Rosenthal Pack, thereby transforming it. While the particular atmosphere after a wolf attack are quite unstable and can quickly dissipate as the carcasses are removed and the attack is forgotten for a while, organised protest keeps these atmospheres alive and 'dicey' between attacks by retelling and discursively restaging them within their own local community and beyond.

\*\*\*

A few months later, in July 2018, a new incident further aggravated the situation in and around Rosenthal. In the early hours of the morning, a wolf chased fallow deer through the village of Cunnewitz until a deer crashed into a fence and died there. When the residents woke up and went outside, the wolf ran away.<sup>33</sup> An activist from a neighbouring village remembers the day:

Then there was this beautiful story in Cunnewitz. In terms of organisation, everything that could go wrong did go wrong. People had called the police, reported everything, while the carcasses were lying around in the sun, two of them about to burst because it was so hot that day. Then a hunter came and removed them. [...] When I was there on Monday, the Landrat was on holiday, neither the reporting chain nor the chain of action worked, not even the game warden was there, nothing. Even the police had no idea what to do after all these years. And I was really interested in how it [the wolf] could run into this village, it was right in the middle of it, it attacked the deer, and how the deer – in its distress – ran here and there, over all the fences, and knocked down a small iron fence [...] where some grandchildren had just camped a few days before. And this fallow deer ran over this fence and would have hit the tent and if the children had been lying there, well, they would have been injured up to their hips. And there was this grandfather, he was in shock, raging and screaming, people were upset [...] they had been up since five in the morning, and they had only heard rumours and screams, and nobody knew what had happened. It was tense. And some people think that kind of thing is normal. The end of the story is that nobody – at least in this village – lets their children camp outside anymore. And that is sad. Because we don't have electric fences that are two metres high, and of course we assume that wolves come through the village at night [...]. Since the wolves have been here, I would never let my grandchildren go out alone, even though they are at the age of five or six – it's just over. And it's so sad. You take away a little bit of freedom from these village children. [...] There is always this feeling of is there something [a wolf] or is there nothing. [...] You have this idea in your head, you can't deny it. And that has nothing to do with Little Red Riding Hood [...].<sup>34</sup>

---

33 “Wolf hetzt Damhirsch mitten in Dorf in den Tod”, in: Nordkurier from 31.07.2018.

34 Interview, Rosenthal activist, 04.08.2020.

A month later, Rosenthal's municipal council submitted an application to the Saxon state government to declare Rosenthal a 'wolf regulation zone': "In recent years, many sheep have been killed in the municipality, farmers and shepherds have suffered damage. Most recently, wolves killed fallow deer in the village of Cunnewitz".<sup>35</sup> In the resolution, the municipal council called for the legal protection of wolves to be reduced, for regular hunting of wolves to be allowed, for the wolf population to be reduced, for hunters and livestock owners to be allowed to kill wolves that attack animals, and for wolf reserves to be created outside the municipality. But all these demands were rejected. This did not come as a surprise, as an open statement by the Rosenthal shepherds about the incident suggests:

In the end, when the Wolf Office was dealing with this case, it became clear to us here in the villages that we were rather a disturbing factor for this institution of the Free State of Saxony. When we finally got hold of someone there, they said they were not responsible. No domestic animals were affected.<sup>36</sup>

By the time the Cunnewitz incident happened, the local population had had several years' experience of wolf attacks on sheep. And although each attack came as a surprise, the people knew they had to expect attacks sooner or later. They were now part of a lifeworld that had become wolf territory. Nevertheless, this event was unexpected and shocking and created an even more tense atmosphere than usual, coupled with concern and anger. What was different this time was that the wolves were not hunting and killing on the outskirts of the village – nor in the woods where they would normally find fallow deer – but right in the middle of Rosenthal's lifeworld, even literally crossing a boundary by coming over the garden fence and into the innermost circle of the home. Normally people (apart from hunters) don't seem to care that much about wolves killing wild animals. But because it happened in a 'domestic' area reserved for humans, the incident suddenly became relevant. *Its necroaesthetics produced what I would call an affective fusion: people realised that it was possible to become 'prey' in this domestic realm*, independently of their own species. Whether the possibility of

---

35 Resolution of the Rosenthal Municipal Council, No. 26–08/2018, 30.08.2018.

36 "Weidetierrisse und kein Ende—Erklärung der Rosenthaler Schäfer", Wolfszone, <http://www.wolfszone.de/01home/00main/texte/rosenthaler%20Sch%C3%A4fer.html> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

being attacked by wolves is real or likely for humans is another matter. What is important in this context is that *the sense of potentially being-prey, the sense of one's own vulnerability*, was suddenly given a material reality by the dead body of a fallow deer.

Like the concern of the activist quoted earlier in this chapter, who saw the number of packs increasing and could not imagine where it would all end, the wolf atmosphere feeds on the real and the virtual. *What concerns people is not just what happened there and then, but what could happen or has happened to other people at other times and in other places. It is not just about the Rosenthal Pack, but about the pack as a representative of a species. In terms of affect, everything that 'the wolf' has ever done and is capable of doing becomes a potential for the Rosenthal Pack.* And as the activist in the quote above said, you don't need fairy tales to fire the imagination (as is often claimed by environmental educators who want to combat wolf tales and myths by confronting them with scientific facts). One only needs to consult relevant Facebook groups such as '*Landleben oder Wolf*', which provides daily updates on wolves from around the world – including gruesome stories, pictures and videos. It cannot be stressed enough that wolf critics do not usually argue on the basis of fictional stories about wolves. They draw on a wide range of incidents – from the (online) media, from social media sites – and relate them to 'the wolf' in general, as well as to the wolves they have to deal with specifically. Marie and the Rosenthal Pack are thus seen as capable of committing all these atrocities, and it is this potential capacity that frightens some. "There is always this feeling", the activist said. This time it was a fallow deer. But could it be me next, or my grandchild? If I had been here at the wrong time, would they have hunted me? What if ...? We see how rational thoughts about possible futures become inextricably intertwined with affects.

\*\*\*

Meanwhile, wolf attacks on sheep continued. In 2018, four confirmed (C1) and another seven unconfirmed (C3) attacks were counted; in 2019, another seven confirmed (C1) and ten unconfirmed (C3) attacks were counted. The shepherds affected were almost always the same. One was particularly badly affected. Having lost three sheep in 2018, his flock was attacked three more times in 2019. In July, he lost thirty-six sheep in one night. They had broken out of their fences during a thunderstorm and were easy prey for the wolves. In September, he lost another three sheep in a pasture that was protected by

an electric fence but not by a fence along the river. A month later I had the opportunity to see the results of another attack.

The events can be reconstructed as follows: In the darkness of the early morning hours, when everyone was asleep, the wolves came across the fields near the village, swam through the Klosterwasser stream and attacked the flock from the unsecured side. The first two sheep were killed, and the rest panicked and ran through the fence, then along the road into the village, the wolves following. On the way, they bit the right hind leg of one sheep, ripping out a large chunk of flesh, skin and wool, and their prey eventually managed to escape into a carport next to a house. Back in the pasture, the wolves killed another sheep and tried to drag it down the stream. But the sheep's wool was soaked with water and became so heavy that they had to leave it dead in the stream before disappearing back into the darkness.

At 6.30am, the shepherd received a call from the owner of the carport, who told him about the injured sheep and the others wandering in the road. When the shepherd arrived and saw what had happened, he called the *Fachstelle Wolf*. A wolf kill expert was sent to investigate and write a report. I arrived at the scene with her at 10:00. We drove to the farm where the shepherd's wife was waiting with her two Border Collies and the injured sheep on a trailer, still in shock and looking rather listless. She was waiting for the vet; her husband was on his way to get a machine to pick up the carcass and remove it from the pasture. The shepherd's wife accompanied us to the pasture and showed us the dead sheep. As we approached, we could see that the rest of the flock was still frightened and huddled in a corner, watching us. The dogs were running around, chasing away a group of ravens who were tampering with one of the carcasses, screeching loudly as they flew away. There were shreds of wool all over the grass, here was the rumen, there were red intestines stretched across the ground like threads. The carcass was ripped open, partially eaten. Lots of flies had settled on it or were buzzing around it. Exposed to the hot October sun that day, it had already begun to smell of decay.

We continued across the pasture to get an overview of the situation. In the stream that ran along the unfenced long side of the pasture, we saw a sheep lying in the water between the water plants. The shepherd's wife barely spoke. Neither did the wolf kill expert, who tried to show both professional demeanour and compassion. "Can I borrow some (disposable-) rubber gloves for me and my husband? [...] I'll bring them back, I promise. Cleaned, of course." The shepherd's wife tried to inject some humour. "Or I'll just put them on the bill", the wolf kill expert joked in return. But apart from these

moments, the silence and the presence of the carcasses created a tense and sad atmosphere. The wolf kill expert began taking photographs and measuring the wolf's bite marks on the sheep's throat; I assisted. The shepherd's wife spoke to a local man and his child who had come to the fence to ask what had happened. Meanwhile, the shepherd drove up to the pasture, ready to remove the carcasses. He was even more taciturn than his wife, and in some ways seemed as listless as the injured sheep in the yard. It was the third time this year that they had gone through such a procedure.

Still, I could not understand why, after all they had been through, they had not fenced off the entire side of the stream, more than 100 metres. Under these circumstances, they would not even receive compensation. But when I asked the shepherd, he showed little reaction. Over there (he pointed to some sheep in another pasture across the stream) the wolves had killed one sheep and injured another just three nights before. They were well fenced, but the wolves still managed to get in. So what was the point of fencing properly, then?

After documenting the carcasses and the fencing, we returned to the farm while the shepherd started to remove the carcasses. At the farm we filled in the necessary forms (as this was not the first incident, most of the information could be taken from previous documents). "Is this about fences or animals?" the shepherd's wife remarked, shaking her head in disbelief at the forms. "I don't understand it. I just don't get it". Two men and a little boy in his big electric toy car came over to comfort the shepherd's wife. I told the shepherd's wife that maybe the boy didn't want to see all this. But she replied that children of that age were not that bothered by such sights. And they would hear about it anyway. News gets around. The wolf kill expert thought this was the right time to leave and we said goodbye. Although the situation was not threatening in any way, she was always cautious. There had been another incident here before where a large group of angry locals had turned up and the situation had become uncomfortable for her. People had started to get angry with her and make derogatory remarks about her in Serbian (assuming she wouldn't understand). They only stopped when she replied in Serbian and then someone recognised her and told the others that she was a local.

We got back in the car and drove back to the *Fachstelle Wolf* at the SMUL near the state capital of Dresden. There was a sense of resignation and hopelessness in the air that day. A month later, the shepherd decided to give up.

*Figure 19-21: The necro-aesthetic of a wolf attack: a sheep injured in the hind leg, a half-eaten sheep, and intestines criss-crossing the pasture.*



Source: Author

Shock. Sadness. Listlessness. Sympathy. Fear. Panic. Anger. Resignation. Hopelessness. Tension. The wolf atmosphere that day was a complex mish-mash involving a shepherd and his wife, their flock of sheep, their two dogs, local residents, a vet and a wolf kill expert with her anthropological assistant. The wolf atmosphere drew on the feelings of the sheep (shock, fear), of the people towards the sheep (sympathy, compassion), and of the people amongst themselves (shock, listlessness, anger, but also the sympathy of the residents with the shepherd's family and perhaps distrust or potential anger towards the wolf kill expert). This atmosphere had a strong material anchorage at the site of the killing with its particular necroaesthetic and as visualised here to some extent through the images. It is difficult to avoid a certain horror in the face of these dead animal bodies, and a sympathy for the injured and suffering animals.

The highest intensity of such a necroaesthetic is found in so-called surplus killing, where wolves kill more animals than they can eat at once. As mentioned above, the Rosenthal Pack killed thirty-six sheep in one night in July 2019, and such surplus killing has occurred frequently in Rosenthal in recent years. It is a phenomenon that contributes to the negative image of wolves like nothing else (apart from the rare cases of humans being killed by wolves):

Surplus killing is still a taboo word in Saxon wolf policy, is supposed to happen only in individual cases, and thus remains without any consequence for the RT Pack. It created a picture of horror in and around Zerna [...], and also caused a herd of cattle including two bulls to leave the pasture at night and flee 400 metres towards [the village of] Gränze. Cattle are flight animals and such a cattle outbreak caused by wolves increases the safety risk strikingly.<sup>37</sup>

In its most extreme form, it is a phenomenon that makes some question the 'naturalness' of such behaviour for a predator and turns wolves into wild beasts that stand out from the rest of the animal world:

Basically, I had nothing against wolves. It was only a photograph showing the eyes of a sheep, torn open at the belly but still alive, that changed my mind. Just this much, that such behaviour can only be mere lust for killing. Animals

---

37 Letter from the Mayor of Rosenthal to the Landrat, 25 Nov 2019 (provided by the Mayor).

kill for food, but the wolf—depending on the possibility—unfortunately kills for pleasure.<sup>38</sup>

So, the step from the wild beast to the motif of the ‘big bad wolf’ is not that great.<sup>39</sup> According to this line of reasoning, wolves seem ‘bestial’ because they behave unlike a real animal, ‘unnaturally’, acting against the appropriate instincts of an animal, thus showing a high degree of agency, i.e. capacity for action and free will.<sup>40</sup> This makes their behaviour unpredictable and therefore more risky and potentially dangerous. Furthermore, if they have free will and choose to kill when they are not hungry, they must have the intention to cause harm and even enjoy it. Or it is in their ‘nature’ that they are driven not only by a hunger instinct, but also by a killing instinct, a ‘lust for murder’, which makes them uncontrollable killing machines? Whichever possibility you think is more likely, both have the potential to spread fear among wolf critics.

However, the horror of *surplus killing* (and to some extent *surplus killing* itself) is man-made, or at least a hybrid phenomenon in which human and animal actions are intertwined. Humans have not only bred animals that cannot effectively defend themselves against a wolf attack, but they also hinder their defence by keeping them in small, fenced-in pastures and perhaps not adequately protecting them. Most importantly, humans interfere prematurely with wolf behaviour by removing carcasses and preventing wolves from returning to the kill site to continue feeding (naturally?) in the days following an attack.<sup>41</sup>

\*\*\*

- 
- 38 “Mindestens 20 tote Schafe in Schönau bei Rosenthal”, MDR, 20.07.2019, <https://www.mdr.de/sachsen/bautzen/bautzen-hoyerswerda-kamenz/schafe-gerissen-verletzt-weide-rosenthal-104.html>. The quote comes from a comment on this media article—now no longer available online—about the first incident with the 36 dead sheep.
- 39 See for a detailed discussion on the formation of the big bad wolf stereotype: Jürgens, Uta M./Hackett, Paul M.: ‘The Big Bad Wolf: The Formation of a Stereotype’, in: *Ecopsychology* 9.1 (2017), pp. 33–43, <https://doi.org/10.1089/eco.2016.0037>.
- 40 See Breyer, Thiemo: ‘Bestien—Zur Anatomie des Schreckens vor dem Animalischen’, in: Erik Norman Dzwiza-Ohlsen/Andreas Speer (eds.), *Philosophische Anthropologie als interdisziplinäre Praxis*, Leiden u.a.: Brill | mentis 2021, pp. 194–204.
- 41 Kruuk, Hans: *Hunter and Hunted: Relationships Between Carnivores and People*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002, pp. 50–53.

In November 2019, the municipal council and the mayor of Rosenthal once again asked the Landrat for the lethal removal of the Rosenthal Pack. What was new this time was that they argued primarily for the protection of public safety and the health of residents. The reason for this change in argumentation may be found in a letter to the mayor written by a local activist of the anti-wolf movement, representing both the *Initiative Wolfsgeschädigte und besorgte Bürger* and the *Verein Sicherheit und Artenschutz*. In this letter, she mentioned the response of the District Office to her earlier ‘report of imminent danger from wolves’:

As there has been no demonstrable progress on the protection status so far, Landrat X is now concentrating his efforts more on the issue of the threat to people in settlements. The Free State is currently working on a wolf ordinance for Saxony that also takes this point into account [...].<sup>42</sup>

Whether this has become a strategy in the renewed attempt to obtain a permit to remove the pack cannot be said with certainty. But the tone of the mayor’s letter to the Landrat was clear. There had been an “escalation of the security situation”. The “threatening security situation”, “serious danger” and “security concerns” leading to “anger and incomprehension” among residents, are based on several wolf attacks on sheep and wolf sightings in the village near a bus stop used mainly by school children. One of the sheep was even found dead in a garage ten metres away from the house of a family with a child. A shepherd’s flock had recently been attacked for the third time this year and some sheep had been “bestially mauled”. In the mayor’s letter, the feelings of helplessness and powerlessness mentioned earlier is again evident when he writes:

I no longer have any sympathy for the official trivialisation of wolves. I lack the support from the state. I can only give inadequate answers to the citizens and refuse to take responsibility for the points mentioned, because I alone cannot provide the necessary safety and cannot be held liable for damage caused by wolves.<sup>43</sup>

The local council hoped that they had finally gathered enough arguments for their request. But the answer from the assistant to the Landrat was sobering:

---

42 Letter to the Mayor of Rosenthal, 11.10.2019 (provided by the Mayor).

43 Letter from the Mayor of Rosenthal to the Landrat, 25 November 2019 (provided by the Mayor).

When the [wolf] ordinance comes into force, the *Fachstelle Wolf* will be responsible for assessing the wolf kills and deciding/recommending the removal of the wolf. If they don't make a recommendation, then theoretically we can still order for the wolf to be removed. But that is only in theory, because in practice the wolf lobby will immediately file criminal charges against the Landrat in such a case—a hundred times over. If one of these charges is successful, the illegal killing could be punishable by up to five years in prison and a fine of 50,000 euros. You will be familiar with the consequences of such a verdict under civil service law. For this reason, the theoretical possibility of granting permission to remove the wolf is nothing but hot air. [...] For the above reasons, Mr X [the Landrat] is therefore not the right person to address the public's resentment.<sup>44</sup>

In this section's episode we see the now familiar pattern of the wolf atmosphere consisting of a threat scenario (to sheep and humans alike) coupled with indignation, anger, and incomprehension towards the wolf authorities for allegedly refusing to help. This particular atmospheric ensemble is best exemplified by the 'citizen wolf monitoring' organised by local activists.

Local activists were dissatisfied with the official wolf monitoring because the numbers never seemed to match what they knew. The strict scientific criteria for proper evidence of a wolf presence, such as scat or genetic traces on killed sheep, means that some reported incidents are regularly dismissed for lack of evidence. These reports are not included in the official statistics, which in turn are the basis for debates and decisions on wolf management. But local activists are angry that wolf managers are contradicting what they know from experience. *I have seen a wolf. Why is the wolf management telling me I haven't seen one? Why are they hiding this fact? This must be a deception in favour of the wolf management's agenda*—these are the common complaints.

---

44 Office of the *Landrat* to the Mayor of Rosenthal, email, 12.05.2019 (provided by the Mayor). This is the same Landrat who had already requested the lethal removal twice. However, with the new wolf ordinance of 2019, the distribution of responsibilities for a lethal removal has changed, giving more power to the county administration. Hence the change of mind of the Landrat and his caution in this matter.

Figure 22: Citizen wolf monitoring with photo documentation and maps of reported and unreported incidents.



Source: Author

I have already pointed out how the wolf atmosphere feeds on both the real and the virtual, showing how a particular local wolf pack becomes interwoven with the wolf species as a whole. Here we see that it is not only the potential capabilities of the wolf that need to be considered. We also need to revise what is meant by 'the real wolves' at the local level. In this context, it is important to understand that a wolf atmosphere is primarily based on the experiential knowledge of the local lifeworld, rather than purely scientific facts based on C1 evidence. It includes clear evidence (C1), confirmed evidence (C2), unconfirmed evidence (C3), non-assessable signs, unreported signs, and in some circumstances even what the SCALP criteria consider to be false observations. These signs have varying affective intensity and force, but not necessarily along the lines of what is officially considered evidence or no evidence, confirmed or unconfirmed. An unconfirmed sign can be just as affective as C1 evidence. *What really counts is the lifeworldly affect of a sign: a killed fallow deer in the middle of the village, an injured sheep in the carport, wolf tracks near a bus stop. As all*

these signs multiply and appear in more and more places, the wolf atmosphere thickens and begins to feel enveloping, intrusive, and unsettling.

\*\*\*

In the meantime, all was quiet in and around Rosenthal. Unusually quiet, perhaps.<sup>45</sup> Officially, 326 animals were killed by wolves in Saxony in 2020 (after 280 in 2018 and 400 in 2019), but no sheep in the municipality of Rosenthal.<sup>46</sup> Only in nearby Wittichenau were eight sheep killed in February 2020, and there were some incidents with cows, but none of these were confirmed as wolf kills. Overall, the number of animals killed by wolves seemed to be decreasing. Some said this was because almost all shepherds (at least in Rosenthal) had given up. Others said it was because shepherds were reporting losses far less. Maybe it was because all of Marie's pups had probably died in road accidents in 2020 and the year before, so there weren't many mouths to feed. Or maybe Marie had died? After my last visit to Rosenthal in the summer of 2020, I was told to wait for the autumn. It will start again in autumn, as it does every year, when the pups are big enough to go hunting with the others. The people of Rosenthal call it "the time of the [wolves'] hunting school".

In mid-August 2020, I received a WhatsApp message from one of the Rosenthal activists showing two killed sheep from the nearby village of Piskowitz. "Like every year". I forwarded the pictures to the wolf kill expert I knew and asked her for details about the case. She did not know that sheep had been killed in Piskowitz. It had not been reported. But she told me to enlarge the picture: Both sheep were tied up with chains – presumably to a stake in the ground, as was and sometimes still is, customary in Lusatia.<sup>47</sup>

---

45 "Stille graue Räuber: Wölfe in der Oberlausitz bleiben in Deckung", MDR, 18.06.2020. <https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/sachsen/bautzen/goerlitz-weisswasser-zittau/stille-graue-raeuber-in-der-oberlausitz-100.html> (accessed: 18.06.2022, no longer available).

46 However, there were two attacks on enclosed deer in Ralbitz-Rosenthal in December; sachsen.de, <https://www.wolf.sachsen.de/schadensstatistik-4169.html> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

47 This chapter covers almost the whole life of the Rosenthal Pack. Since 2020, there have been only three more attacks on sheep in Rosenthal. Marie had more pups until the monitoring year 2021/22, but there have been no signs of her or her pack since then. From 2022/23, the Rosenthal Pack is no longer officially listed as an existent pack.

## Towards a concept of wolf atmosphere

In this chapter I have explored not only how a region became a wolf territory, but also how it became a 'landscape of fear' in the experience of local residents and anti-wolf activists. In this conclusion, I will draw together the findings of this chapter to present a multifaceted concept of what I have called a wolf atmosphere, and thereby contribute to our understanding of how complex socioecologies of fear develop from a particular human perspective. The following key points summarise how wolf atmospheres function as affective arrangements:

1. Wolves as atmospheric producers: Wolves, through their lives and actions in their territory, inscribe and engineer the emotional fabric of a shared human-wolf landscape. But so do humans and other animals who, together with wolves, all contribute in their own way to this complex mix of different affective forces. This chapter has shown that wolves affect through their physical presence (sightings) and, even more powerfully, through their powerful affective traces left in the necroaesthetics of wolf kills. However, we have also seen that and how wolf atmospheres are volatile, influenced by continuing wolf attacks and sightings on the one hand, but also by human responses, organised protests, lack of herd protection measures and changing perceptions of the wolf's potential capabilities on the other.

2. The nexus of necroaesthetics: Central to understanding the wolf atmosphere of fear is the concept of 'necroaesthetics', an affective-sensory pattern that emerges from the way wolves hunt, kill and consume their prey. Due to the visceral co-presence of the experiencing subject and dead/injured animal bodies, the wolf-specific necroaesthetic (as exemplified in surplus killing and especially when performed by a whole pack of wolves) is characterised by an unsettling atmospheric immersion in a scene of violence (lots of blood, torn flesh), death, suffering and predation (carcasses and body parts strewn about as signs of pursuit, struggle and fear), which contrasts with the normal (and ideal-idyllic) aesthetics of a pasture or rural village.

3. Variations of fear: The example of Rosenthal shows that a simple characterisation of the local wolf atmosphere as a landscape of fear is too simplistic and reductionist. In this chapter we see that fear is actually expressed in a wide range of affective states, such as caution (not letting the children go into the woods), vigilance (initiating citizen monitoring), worry (about attacks on sheep), anxiety (generally about living in wolf territory), and even panic (the grandfather after a deer pursued by wolves broke through his fence). Developing a more nuanced understanding of fear helps to decipher what 'fear of

wolves' might mean in a given context, and thus to work on more nuanced options for wolf management to address these varieties of fear more specifically.

4. Fear reveals vulnerability: Fear has a dual structure; it points simultaneously outwards (fear-of) and inwards (fear-for). Thus, examining threats inevitably reveals 'what is at stake' for stakeholders. Fear of wolves is connected to a sense of vulnerability, of one's livestock or pets, of one's livelihood, of one's home, or even of one's own life. Some of these vulnerabilities have a material reality, as demonstrated by the necroaesthetics of wolf kills; others are based more on what might happen, feeding mainly on the uncertainties and unpredictability of wolf behaviour.

5. Affective complexity: Emotions rarely come alone, and wolf atmospheres go well beyond fear. Emotions such as shock and fear (of wolves), anger (towards wolf managers), frustration and resentment (towards local politicians) and sympathy (for shepherds and their injured sheep) are all typically involved. The task is then to see how certain emotions, in which constellations and under what conditions become integral dimensions of wolf atmospheres.

6. Transgression of local sensibilities: A wolf atmosphere materialises when the familiar lifeworld of humans is disrupted by the disturbing presence of wolves and wolf attacks on domestic animals. It emerges when wolves cross the boundaries of human domains, challenging the established order and familiarity of these spaces. Local sensibilities – as the emotional backdrop to people's everyday lives – shift from a comfortable sense of home, or 'ontological security', to an unsettling emotional state as individuals grapple with the unfamiliar feelings evoked by the presence of wolves.

7. Shifting axes of conflict: The emergence of a wolf atmosphere is the result of both conflicts with wolves and conflicts between stakeholders over wolves. The latter include 'vertical' conflicts between local stakeholders and official wolf management institutions, and 'horizontal' conflicts between local stakeholders and pro-wolf organisations and their representatives. By looking at these two axes, we can shift our perspective away from focusing too much on the wolf as the sole producer and instead integrate wolves into the structural elements of a wolf atmosphere as a whole. Continuing the line of argument about wolf agency from the last chapter, to describe a wolf atmosphere structurally along its axes is to delineate the fault lines of the atmosphere as an affective arrangement.

8. Local experiential knowledge: Wolf atmospheres are felt and known from the position of the local lifeworld, rather than from a purely rational position based on scientific evidence. Unconfirmed signs, local stories and

personal experience can all contribute to the intensity of the atmosphere. What matters from a lifeworld perspective is how wolves show up in everyday life and how people respond to their presence. This difference between local experiential knowledge and the scientific knowledge used in wolf management is in itself a source of conflict about wolves and thus contributes to the wolf atmosphere (primarily through emotions of anger, resentment or frustration directed vertically at wolf management).

As we can see, fear of wolves could be a good starting point and indicator for studying human-wolf conflicts. However, it is important firstly to unravel, elaborate and be precise about what people actually mean by fear. And secondly, to find out exactly how this fear arises, i.e. what factors contribute to it (who, when, where, why, etc.). In doing so, we shift the phenomenon from being about a subjective emotional state of individual actors and a conflict caused by only one animal (species), to a complex intersubjective, social atmosphere of more-than-human coexistence in a shared landscape of humans and wolves (and other animals).