

5. Wolf Feelings

The role of feelings, sentiments, and ethos

In Chapter 3 we saw how coexistence with wolves is affectively charged, accompanied by recurrent emotional outbursts from a wide range of actors in response to wolfish agency. In Chapter 4, I showed how emotionally coloured atmospheres can spread beyond individual actors in a region, persist over time, and thus can shape spontaneous individual emotional experiences. In this chapter, the feelings that shape the relationship between wolves and humans finally take centre stage: I aim to outline and understand the emotional worlds of important groups of actors by a) attempting to capture the repertoire of 'typical' feelings in relation to the wolf; and b) showing how individual, spontaneous feelings are expressions of more enduring affective structures or dispositions. It becomes clear that the opinions, attitudes, and values that are otherwise at the forefront of the public wolf debate are not simply expressions of rational evaluations based on knowledge but are rather to be understood as expressions of *sentiments*, a concept that "connects cognitive processes of forming opinions and judgements with affective dynamics" and which "contain regular patterns, orderly procedures, and rules of how sense is to be made of the world".¹

So, when I map the emotional worlds of the shepherds, hunters, and wolf friends below, I am not simply listing the emotions, nor measuring the intensity of the emotions, nor judging them as 'positive' or 'negative'. I am trying to understand why, out of the whole range of possible emotions/feelings, only some are typically experienced by a group of actors/stakeholders, and to what extent these feelings can be meaningfully located in their specific lifeworld. In concrete terms, this means that the question of wolf-related feelings is related

1 J. Bens/O. Zenker: Sentiment, p. 96.

to the question of **what it feels like to be a shepherd/hunter/wolf friend in general—in this time, in this society, with wolves?**² This approach emphasises the fact that the actors are not ‘innocently’ affected by wolves, but have an affective history – a structure of feelings and sentiments that colour their interactions and inform their responses.

As an anthropologist, I am less interested in individual biographical antecedents than in cultural patterns in the affective structures of the groups of actors. The idea—inspired by practice theory—is that shepherds, for example, as a community of practice³ and through their shepherding practice, have acquired not only skills, knowledge, and competencies but also the norms, values, and sentiments of their community. In other words, shepherding as a way of life has its own *ethos*, “the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood”.⁴ This does not mean, however, that all shepherds feel, think, and act in the same way (since the individual biographical background mentioned above remains). What is expressed here is a certain spectrum of possibilities, a typical range of affective structures in which individual affective experience occurs and finds expression.

But the methodological question is: how do you identify what is typical for a group of actors? In ethnographic research like this, this is done by collecting and correlating different types of data. Observations are correlated with informal conversations, interviews, official documents from associations, comments on social media, media contributions, and so on, in order to identify patterns across the board (and not just in individual statements). This will also reveal possible differentiations within the community: for example, if there are different views on wolves, rather than one typical view, this will sooner or later appear in several types of data. In interpreting the data I have therefore followed the principle: generalise where possible, differentiate where necessary.

Each of these groups of actors could easily have filled its own chapter, if not a whole book. Treating all three in one chapter was necessary for the coherence of this book, but it means that what follows is not a conclusive overview, but a first approach to the phenomenon. What is important in this context is

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- 2 In this chapter, for a better overview of the mapping of emotional worlds, I set indicative emotion terms in bold.
 - 3 On the concept of community of practice, see Lave, Jean/Wenger, Etienne: *Situated Learning. Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991.
 - 4 C. Geertz: *Interpretation of cultures*, p. 89.

to develop an approach to these affective worlds in the first place and to describe them so that they can be opened up to academic and public discourse. Despite the limitations of having to cover everything in one chapter, I have always aimed for a ‘thick description’ of feelings. Feelings are not only treated here as emotions—as a culturally normalised category (hate, anger, love, envy, etc.)—but also described in their (phenomenological) experiential qualities. Being angry at wolves or loving wolves can mean many things. Only a thick description establishes the contexts of meaning that are necessary to understand these feelings as typical for a group of actors. It also allows for a more differentiated view of feelings in the wolf conflict: away from simple attributions to emotional categories, towards a complex understanding of the indeterminate, ambivalent, dynamic character of affective experiences. This differentiated view also involves distinguishing feelings directed at wolves from those directed at other social actors in the wolf conflict.

One final point: by now it should be obvious that emotions in wolf issues have a political dimension. Accordingly, adopting a scholarly-critical perspective means repeatedly thematising the political, especially when there is an interest in a certain positive form of external representation, which must be treated as just that—a ‘representation’, a ‘performance’. Here again, the ethnographic perspective is helpful: representations of interest groups can be compared or contrasted with statements of individual actors and observations of events and actions in order to point out contradictions or inconsistencies or to be able to complement what is officially unsaid with what is said elsewhere.

“Loved. Wanted. Sacrificed?”⁵: shepherds, wolves and sheep

Livestock owners are generally considered to be the most affected stakeholder group by the return of wolves, and among them sheep farmers in particular.⁶ As sheep account for almost 90 per cent of the wolf-caused mortalities⁷, it

5 This is the title of a DVD published by the Förderverein der Deutschen Schafhaltung e.V. on the subject of animal husbandry and wolves.

6 Supplementary to my elaborations on shepherds, see a qualitative study co-supervised by me: Ostrowski, Lea: Die Rückkehr des Wolfs in den Leuscheider Wald: Untersuchungen zu Akzeptanz und naturbezogenen Werten im Bereich der Weidetierhaltung, Master's thesis, Hochschule für nachhaltige Entwicklung Eberswalde 2022.

7 As of 2020, according to DBBW, <https://www.dbb-wolf.de/wolfsmanagement/herden-schutz/schadensstatistik> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

makes sense to focus on sheep farmers.⁸ They are a heterogeneous group consisting of full-time professional shepherds as well as (and these are the ones I mentioned that allow for a better differentiation) part-time sheep farmers and hobby sheep farmers.

Figure 23: At a demonstration by livestock farmers in Wiesbaden.



Source: Author

It is also important to distinguish them from other livestock keepers and to explore what is special about their situation. It seems important that sheep farmers are a marginal, small group among livestock owners. In the whole of Germany there are about 1.5 million sheep (as of 2021–2023)⁹ and about 18,000 sheep farmers, of whom less than a thousand are professional shepherds (as of 2016).¹⁰ They see themselves as ‘endangered’—similar to the wolf and similar to

8 Other types of farmers or animal owners are only marginally affected by wolf kills in Germany, but they feel at least potentially affected and threatened. Doing justice to their particular situation would go beyond the scope here.

9 Federal Statistical Office, <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Branchen-Unternehmen/Landwirtschaft-Forstwirtschaft-Fischerei/Tiere-Tierische-Erzeugung/Tabellen/betriebe-schafen-und-schafenbestand.html> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

10 “Schäfer in Not: Zahl der Berufsschäfer jetzt unter 1000!”, top agrar online, 06.03.2018, <https://www.topagrar.com/management-and-politics/news/schaefer-in-not-zahl-d>

some of their old, rare sheep breeds.¹¹ The former president of the Federal Association of Professional Shepherds explains: “Statistics show declining numbers for the sector. The average age is over 56. Shepherd schools have 10–20 trainees per year. Incomes on farms are at the lower end of the agricultural income scale”.¹²

Other problems include a shortage of vets, high vet bills, intense competition, high costs for grazing land, heavy reliance on subsidies, competition for their products from foreign imports, increased bureaucracy, and seven-day weeks with no holidays. The basic ethos among shepherds is therefore one of **existential angst**. “What will tomorrow bring?”—this slogan on a poster at a demonstration by livestock owners and against wolves in Wiesbaden sums up well the deep-seated **insecurity** and **uncertainty about the future** and about how things should go on (now with wolves).

In addition, the social position of sheep farmers has long been marginal: they have neither been visible as a professional group nor have they had a voice to draw public attention to their problems, or the power to make demands—unlike other livestock and animal owners who have relatively powerful interest groups through the German Farmers’ Association (DBV) or the German Equestrian Federation (FN).¹³ This leads to a widespread feeling among shepherds of a **lack of respect and (social) recognition** for their profession and for what they do with their animals for society and the environment.

However, these feelings are secondary when compared to the importance of the affective relationship that sheep farmers have with their animals. This is illustrated by M., a professional shepherd with about 800 sheep near Neuwied, in the territory of the former Neuwied Pack.¹⁴ He is about to retire and hand over the farm to his daughter. Only once in his life has he been separated from his sheep—while on holiday—and every day he called his daughter to check on

er-berufsschaefer-jetzt-unter-1000-9410439.html (accessed: 20.06.2022, no longer available).

11 “Gedanken zur Rückkehr der Wölfe nach Deutschland”, Die Schäfer. Bundesverband Berufsschäfer e.V., 19.10.2014. <https://www.berufsschaefer.de/news/33/10/152/schafe-wolf-und-artenschutz> (accessed: 20.06.2022, no longer available).

12 Günther Czerkus: “Viele Fragen zur Zukunft der Schaf- und Ziegenhaltung”, *ibid.*, 24.06.2016. <https://www.berufsschaefer.de/news/50/9/152/wo-soll-die-reise-hingehen> (accessed: 20.06.2022, no longer available).

13 Hence the attempts to become more publicly visible through grazing animal days, open pasture days, the national sheep show or the European shepherds’ procession.

14 Interview, shepherd, from Rhineland-Palatinate, 30.06.2020.

them: whether they had enough food and water and whether everything else was OK. He could not 'let go' of his professional duties, of his sheep. His shepherding was characterised by **care** in a twofold sense: **care for** his sheep and **care about** his sheep. Both forms of care together are constitutive of the practice of shepherding and shape the relationship between shepherd and sheep. This relationship is a reciprocal one, but also a hierarchical one. The practice of herding and the long domestication process of the sheep indicate that there is a clear power relationship and power imbalance in this relationship. The care for and about the sheep is also inextricably linked to their use, which is primarily for meat, milk, wool—and more recently for ecological landscape management or even use as *companion animals* (as companions for oneself or on guided sheep walks for interested city dwellers).

How the relationship between a sheep farmer and his animals is formed in each concrete case depends very much on the way in which they are used. The type of care can become a form of affection and love or more superficial and driven by economic interests. A couple from the Westerwald region, who keep over a hundred goats for landscape conservation and offer goat walks, and whose herd partly consists of formerly neglected and sick rescue goats that have been raised on bottles, have developed a different form of care than a young family father near Bautzen who keeps a few sheep behind the house to provide meat for his family. What both examples have in common is that humans and animals are not necessarily connected in a family, but in a 'household'. As the cultural anthropologists Michaela Fenske and Marlis Heyer argue:

Those who belong to the household are protected. This makes sense because the household has been an essential basis of successful human economic activity since pre-modern Europe. Of course, this does not mean that the animals in question [...] may not be eaten. [...] However, certain standards are applied with regard to their permissible use, which seem appropriate to the people caring for them. This historically grown, often ambivalent logic characterises rural multispecies work modes and economic communities.¹⁵

It is this shared household of sheep farmer and animal in the field of tension between care and dominance/use that has to be maintained again and again

15 Fenske, Michaela/Heyer, Marlis: 'Wer zum Haushalt gehört. Ethiken des Zusammenlebens in der Diskussion', in: *Tierethik* 11.19 (2019), pp. 12–33, here pp. 20–21 (translated by TG).

through daily work and whose existence is at stake. This coexistence is characterised by a ‘shared vulnerability’¹⁶—both animal keeper and animal are and become vulnerable in their shared way of life. They depend on each other, especially in shepherding, because sheep have their own vulnerability that distinguishes them from other domestic animals such as cows or horses. In the words of one shepherd, “sheep are built close to death”; “they are always dying of something” and so “you often blame yourself”. Caring-for-and-about is therefore an ongoing task.

It is into this affective world that wolves now enter. Their entry might look like this:

[SHEPHERD:] The first time was in February 2010 [...]. The snow was so high that you couldn't get any electricity on the fence. But the guard dog was in there and the guard dog basically pushed the flock into the other paddock, but they [the wolves] still got some [...] Yes, you come out early and see the sheep stuck in another flock and the wolf still there and eating [...].

[INTERVIEWER:] Did you scare him away?

[SHEPHERD:] Yes, we scared him away, we [...].

[INTERVIEWER:] How did you do that?

[SHEPHERD:] We shouted hoo-hoo (laughs). That's the way it is, there's no other way, you've got no other option.

[INTERVIEWER:] What is it like to see an animal killed like that?

[SHEPHERD] It always depends on how many are killed. If it's just one, you can't see it from a distance. You see one lying there, you go and look, maybe it's dead, and then you see if it's a wolf kill, or you see that the fence is down, or ... So I'm not shocked when I see a dead sheep. It would be worse

16 Fenske, Michaela: ‘Menschen, Wölfe und andere Lebewesen. Perspektiven einer Multispecies Ethnography’, in: Lara Selin Ertener/Bernd Schmelz (eds.), *Von Wölfen und Menschen*, Hamburg: Museum am Rothenbaum 2019, pp. 33–40, here p. 37; see also Arnold, Irina: ‘Von traumatisierten Schafen und verwundbaren Lebenswelten: Stimmen von Weidetierhalter*innen aus Niedersachsen’, in: Lara Selin Ertener/Bernd Schmelz (eds.), *Von Wölfen und Menschen*, Hamburg: Museum am Rothenbaum 2019, pp. 41–50.

if there were thirty or forty of them. That would be bad. But thank God I haven't experienced that yet, and I don't want to, because it's shit, it's really bad.¹⁷

S. has been a professional shepherd for almost forty years and for more than ten years he has worked on a large farm in Lusatia, right in the heart of the territory of the Knappenrode-Seenland Pack. His flock of Coburg chestnut sheep is used purely for landscape conservation and has already been attacked by wolves three or four times in the last ten years, with one or two sheep being killed each time. Considering that S. regularly sees wolves pass by his flock several times a month, his attitude is surprisingly calm and pragmatic. Losses are very limited and his herd protection with electric fences has worked well from the start.

However, when wolves first arrive in a region and encounter unprotected sheep, however, things can be very different, as this shepherd from the Odenwald region, located between Bavaria and Hesse, tells us:

It was a difficult day for me in 2017, it was in November. I will never forget that day. I had 300 ewes, 600 ewes in total, and I was in Hesse with 300 ewes and people called me at seven in the morning and said the sheep were gone. So, I went there because I come from Bavaria, which is 15 kilometres away. When I got to the pasture, I was stunned, eight animals were dead, bitten by wolves. And then I started to look for my animals. They were scattered all over the place. And the strange thing was that I was right next to the kindergarten in the village, so you can't be responsible for that anymore, that can go wrong. So, I went back to look for my animals. Then I called the police. And the police came and called the district office. Then someone from the wolf management came. And then he said it was a stray dog. [...] Then they took DNA samples and after 14 days I got the results. Not from the authorities, and that's such a sad picture, not from the authorities, but from the press I found out that it was a wolf. This is simply impossible. Not even a phone call, how can I help you [...]. I had eight dead sheep, two days later I had two more dead and six badly injured, I needed a vet, I had to find money for that, and then at Christmas I had the stillbirths. One hundred and thirty stillborn lambs! Technically I'm dead, kaput. And I got nothing from the state of Hesse. No phone call, nothing at all [...].¹⁸

17 Interview, shepherd, from Saxony, 16.03.2022.

18 Interview, shepherd, from Bavaria, 15.01.2020.

The wolves left this shepherd in a **state of shock**. **Uncertainty** about the whereabouts of his sheep coupled with extreme **concern** about whether they were well, injured, or even dead, characterise the immediate aftermath of this attack. His emotional state is exacerbated by the lack of support from the wolf management. In his view, his suffering is not seen, not acknowledged, no offer of help is made. He **feels alone, abandoned** in the face of the tragedy he has experienced.

This example also shows that the affective impact of a wolf attack is not limited to the moment but extends over time. In this case, the wolves did not just come once, they came again two days later. Injured animals had to be treated, the sheep were frightened for days, then there were the stillbirths, the mounting financial losses and the question of what tomorrow will bring. For many shepherds in new wolf regions, therefore, a **diffuse sense of anxiety** is spreading rapidly. Uncertainty about when, where and how wolves might attack again, creates a **sense of vague, anxious anticipation**:

[INTERVIEWER:] Do you know how far away the nearest wolf is?

[SHEPHERD:] You can never be sure. They could be here tonight, they could be here now. It's also possible we won't see any for the whole year.¹⁹

Anxiety thus becomes a constant companion and changes the shepherds' ethos:

[SHEPHERD:] We have already had attacks here [in the region]. Yes, then of course you no longer have a good feeling, also if you go there in the morning [...]. If you go there with that feeling in your gut, *hopefully everything went well, hopefully he [the wolf] wasn't there*. It's not like he's only going to come once. The fear remains.²⁰

Against this background, it sometimes seems incomprehensible that in many places—including my research regions of Lusatia and the Westerwald—herd protection is only hesitantly accepted, and in some cases rejected outright. Especially among keepers of suckling cow herds and horse owners, as well as among side-line and hobby sheep farmers, the **anger** about the return of the wolves (which they never wanted!) seems to lead to **defiance**, which is directed

19 Interview, shepherd, from Hesse, 15.01.2020.

20 Interview, shepherd, from Hesse, 15.01.2020.

against the wolves as well as the wolf management and wolf advocates: If you want the wolves here, it should not be me who has to do the extra work, but you! In contrast to other countries²¹, protection from predators is apparently no longer considered a natural part of the herding relationship between humans and farm animals in Germany. “Who will protect my animals?” read one poster at the demonstration in Wiesbaden. Some livestock owners see others as having a duty of care when it comes to wolves.

Another reason for the potential rejection of herd protection measures is the pressure from within the livestock owner communities. In the Westerwald, for example, several research participants confirmed to me that the practice of herd protection is seen in the community as an unwelcome sign of acceptance of wolves and wolf management. Livestock owners who practice herd protection are called ‘nest foulers’ and are subject to hostility. The return of the wolves has brought livestock owners closer together, which requires unity within the group—and also between the different groups of livestock owners. However, the issue of herd protection shows that there is a lack of unity.

Although there are no two opposing camps among sheep farmers, there are certainly differences in sentiment about the wolf, and these are reflected above all at association level. This is illustrated by two position papers on the wolf issue. On the one hand, there is the wolf-critical Action Alliance Forum Nature, which brings together the Association of German State Sheep Breeders’ Associations (VDL), the German Hunting Association (DJV) along with the International Hunting Association (CIC), the German Equestrian Federation (FN), the German Farmers’ Association (DBV), and the Association of Forest Owners (AGDW). In their position paper, they argue for a reduction of the wolf’s protected status; call for hunting, easier removal, and the introduction of a so-called *Akzeptanzbestand* (accepted maximum number of wolves); and question the current scientific monitoring regime. Sheep farmers who are part of this alliance are among the most bitter opponents of wolves. Anger and resentment against the wolf and the wolf management that supports it is greatest among them.

On the other hand, the moderate side is the Federal Association of Professional Shepherds together with BUND, NABU, the German Animal Welfare Association, and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). Their “Cor-

21 For example, in Albania, see Trajce, Aleksander: The gentleman, the vagabonds and the stranger: cultural representations of large carnivores in Albania and their implications for conservation. PhD Thesis, university of Roehampton, UK, 2017.

nerstones for a low-conflict coexistence” recognise the protected status of the wolf and call for no hunting, but for better prevention of wolf attacks, promotion of herd protection, compensation for damage, and greater participation in wolf management processes. But if you are looking for pro-wolf sentiment among sheep farmers, you will not find it here, because even the moderates can do without wolves, show them no affection and are not fascinated by them. They have a right to exist, but they should know their place in the human order of nature, as this quote makes clear:

We shepherds have many more problems than we need. The decline in sheep numbers and farms is frightening. Now we have the wolf on top of that. The wolf is just one of many animals that cause us additional problems [...]. We really don't need all this! [...] Wolves have no business in our settlements and on our pastures. We need clear boundaries. [...] Successful coexistence is only possible if everyone knows where they belong!²²

In general, it can also be said that the sentiments of sheep farmers towards wolves are far from being consolidated but are dynamically adapting to current developments. For example, there seem to be recent changes in the Federal Association of Professional Shepherds. The former president of the association recently resigned, claiming that the association was becoming more and more aligned with the wolf-critical demands of the Action Alliance instead of taking more initiative on herd protection issues. **Frustrated** with the association, he took matters into his own hands and set up an informal group called “Colleagues Helping Colleagues Protect Herds” on the territory of the Leuscheid Pack to provide practical and rapid support for herd protection among a diverse group of livestock owners, wolf friends, and others.

This brings us back to the question of why herd protection is still rejected by many sheep farmers. The initiator of the collegial help group sees a widespread feeling of **powerlessness, resignation, and hopelessness** among sheep farmers. I first noticed this with the shepherd couple in Rosenthal whom I had visited after a wolf attack (see Chapter 4). As a reminder: Despite several attacks within a few months, the sheep pasture was still not completely fenced when the wolves came for the third time, so the shepherd could not be compensated

22 Günther Czerkus: “Der Wolf und die Lämmlein”, Die Schäfer. Bundesverband Berufsschäfer e.V., 21.09.2015. <https://www.berufsschaefer.de/news/40/10/152/der-wolf-und-die-laemmlein> (accessed: 20.06.2022, no longer available).

for his losses. When asked about this, the shepherd would only refer to his neighbour's flock, where even complete protection of the flock had failed to prevent a wolf attack. In the end, the situation for shepherds like him seems hopeless, the protection of the flock futile and useless. The 'Rosenthal Shepherds' Declaration' puts it this way:

We have improved herd protection as much as we could, but some of the advice and demands of the herd protection advisors were simply not practicable. Failure to follow them was interpreted as bad faith. However, it is known from all wolf countries in the EU that wolves will overcome any fence used in practical animal husbandry as long as this obstacle does not pose a direct threat to them. This does not prevent the Saxon wolf management from now offering a field trial to see if there is a possibility. Where is this supposed to lead? The ultimate wolf-proof fence is in the Moritzburg game park.²³

In this context, sheep farmers also like to talk about the 'pointless arms race' against wolves. But where do these fatalistic sentiments come from? On the one hand, they are a side-effect of the wolf's legal status as a protected species and its inviolability for the sheep farmers (their only remaining means of defence, as the Lusatian shepherd quoted above reported, is to shout 'hoo-hoo'). They themselves have no means of dealing with the wolf directly. In their self-perception, their hands are tied, they are condemned to passive observation. The fact that they have at least an indirect option for action in the form of herd protection is not seen as such.

But this feeling of powerlessness is also encouraged within their own ranks. While wolf management promotes herd protection and tries to hold out the prospect of a practical solution to the 'wolf problem', the demoralising sentiments come mainly from within their own ranks. People keep telling each other about how bad and hopeless the situation is, confirming each other's fears and at least sharing a common grief. All this is usually done rather

23 "Weidetierrisse und kein Ende—Erklärung der Rosenthaler Schäfer", Wolfszone, <http://www.wolfszone.de/01home/000main/texte/rosenthaler%20Sch%C3%A4fer.html> (accessed: 30.04.2024, translated by TG); Similarly, the latest Open Letter of Saxon livestock owners (with Landesbauernverband, Landesjagdverband, FN etc.) to the Prime Minister of Saxony from May 2022. The ultimate wolf-proof fence mentioned in the quote refers to the fact that wolf fences in enclosures are more than 2 metres high for the safety of visitors and far exceed the minimum heights of fences for herd protection.

casually, but sometimes these sentiments are deliberately stirred up in order to mobilise and facilitate certain political solutions, as I show in detail in the Chapter 6. Those who are resigned and see themselves as incapable of action, so the calculation goes, are all the more likely to look to others for the duty to act. The demand for changes in the law virtually takes the place of one's own duty to protect the flock. While political solutions are being struggled for and herd protection is not being universally implemented, wolves take the opportunity to continue killing sheep. This in turn increases feelings of powerlessness and resignation among local sheep farmers and creates such pressure that herd protection seems inevitable. This was the situation in the Westerwald in the summer of 2022, where the wolf GW1896m had been regularly killing sheep in unprotected flocks for more than a year (more on this wolf in the next chapter).

The issue of herd protection has thus become a focal point for conflicts between sheep farmers and wolves, sheep farmers and wolf management, and among sheep farmers themselves. The picture is completed when the tense relationship between them and wolf advocates is also addressed using the example of herd protection. On the one hand, wolf friends, such as the Wiki-Wolves association, offer help in building fences or providing night guards for the flock. But here, too, cooperation is unthinkable for many sheep farmers, because wolf friends are seen as wolf cuddlers with a 'romantically transfigured', 'trivialising', 'alienated (from nature)' image of wolves. To accept their help would be to take the wolves' presence for granted. The relationship with these supportive wolf friends is made even more difficult by other wolf friends, mainly from the group *Wolfsschutz Deutschland*, who carry out so-called fence inspections on pastures all over Germany to check for the 'correct' condition of wolf-repellent fences and make public what they find.

In Chapter 4, I described the actions of *Wolfsschutz Deutschland* in Rosenthal from the perspective of a Rosenthal resident and activist. The organisation is also active in the Westerwald, where they have been checking fences.²⁴ The **anger** caused by the confrontation with the sheep farmers is inevitable and is discussed on Facebook or on the spot. The relationship between sheep farmers

24 "Große Exklusivreportage NRW: Wölfe im Fadenkreuz zwischen Rotkäppchenhysterie, Anfütterung, Fake-News und geplanter Wolfsverordnung", Wolfsschutz-Deutschland, 23.12.2021, <https://wolfsschutz-deutschland.de/2021/12/23/grosse-exklusivreportage-nrw-woelfe-im-fadenkreuz-zwischen-rotkaeppchenhysterie-anfuetterung-fake-news-und-geplanter-wolfsverordnung/> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

and wolf friends can take on an almost sinister turn when livestock owners report threats. A goat farmer from Buchholz (in the area of the Leuscheid Pack), for example, was approached on his pasture late one evening by two strangers who warned him to “keep his feet still” on the wolf issue, after which the two disappeared again.²⁵ The goat farmer was one of the initiators of a regional WhatsApp group on wolves, where information on wolves is passed on to livestock owners, and his name was known in this context. After this incident, he and his wife became **concerned** and wondered what other threats they might face. From the point of view of most livestock owners, these are all examples of *the* behaviour of wolf advocates as a whole. People don’t usually distinguish between WikiWolves, Wolfsschutz Deutschland, the anonymous people who make threats, and other wolf advocates. It is mainly the negative experiences that stick in people’s mind and thus determine their general view of wolf supporters. Of course, there are also some positive examples of successful cooperation (such as in the above-mentioned alliance between the Association of Professional Shepherds and nature conservation organisations, or the many actions of WikiWolves, NABU, or the GzSdW), but here, too, established enemy images often have to be overcome first.

“They have no respect!”: hunters, wolves, and other wild animals

The hunters, I say, especially the old hunters, still see the wolf as a plague. [...] They don’t talk about it, but you can see it in their expressions when they talk about what they have experienced with the wolf, the tone in which it is described, and also the reactions of the hunters, you can see that they are clearly against it. I would say that at the level of the hunting associations and so on, where there is more diplomacy, you hear different tones, although I also believe that it is basically a very critical attitude. I would also like to shoot a wolf. I’m a hunter and it’s huntable game [...] normally.²⁶

25 Interview, two goat farmers, from Rhineland-Palatinate, 05.07.2021.

26 Interview, hunters, southern Brandenburg, 12.10.2019.

Figure 24: At the end of a driven hunt on the military training area Oberlausitz, the oldest wolf territory in Germany.



Source: Author

What does it feel like to be a hunter—in this time, in this society, with wolves? Before I address this question, I would like to briefly provide some information about the hunting community in Germany. The number of male and female hunters has been increasing steadily for years. In 2020–21, there were 403,420 hunting licence holders, 93 percent of them male, with an average age of 57, from a wide range of social backgrounds.²⁷ When it comes to hunters and wolves, it is important to note that the hunting community as a whole is divided (albeit very unequally)—both in its understanding of hunting and in its relationship with the wolf: On the one hand, there are the ‘traditional’ hunters, organised in the regional associations of the German Hunting Association (DJV); on the other hand, there are the ‘ecological’ hunters, organised in the regional associations of the Ecological Hunting Association (ÖJV), in addition to a number of non-organised hunters, whom I will call the pragmatists here. In this chapter I will refer mainly to the ‘traditional’ hunters, as they not only represent the absolute majority in terms of numbers but are also the most ‘explainable’ in terms of their relationship with the wolf.²⁸ The DJV has more

27 Facts and figures on hunters. German Hunting Association (DJV), <https://www.jagdverband.de/zahlen-fakten/zahlen-zu-jagd-und-jaegern> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

28 An early quantitative study on attitudes towards the wolf in the Saxon hunting community, see Gärtner, Sigmund/Hauptmann, Michaela: ‘Das sächsische Wolfsvorkom-

than 250,000 members, and in some federal states (Bavaria, Rhineland-Palatinate, Lower Saxony) more than 80 percent of the hunters are organised in the DJV.

Although the ÖJV has a total of only about 1,900 members²⁹ (mainly from the ranks of foresters and private forest owners), it is institutionally well anchored (in forestry agencies, federal and state authorities), so that ecological hunting methods dominate in the state's spheres of influence. The ÖJV was founded in the 1980s as a split from the DJV and under heavy—also public—criticism of 'traditional hunting'.³⁰ 'Ecological hunting' stands for scientifically based hunting as wildlife management, and it follows the findings of wildlife biology with regard to ecosystem management. From this perspective, the wolf—like other predators—is seen as an important part of functioning ecosystems and its return to Germany is accordingly welcomed.³¹ This is reflected, for example, in the ÖJV's good relations with other nature and species conservation organisations, such as in the *Platform for Grazing Animals and Wolves*.³²

When it comes to conflicts with and about wolves, it is usually the traditional hunters, not the ecological hunters, who are involved. To understand their relationship with wolves, it is helpful to briefly consider the traditional hunters' relationship with wildlife in general.³³ For hunters, there is one category of animals that is at the centre of their interest: *Wild* ('game'), that is, the huntable species of wild animals. They have a special relationship with this game, which is characterised by what is known as *Hege* ('stewardship'). Similar

men im Spiegelbild der Jägerschaft vor Ort—Ergebnisse einer anonymen Umfrage', in: *Beiträge zur Jagd- und Wildforschung* 30 (2005), pp. 223–230.

29 Unsere Mitglieder. Deutscher Naturschutzring (DNR), <https://www.dnr.de/mitglieder/organisationen/oekologischer-jagdverband-ev-oejv> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

30 See Bode, Wilhelm/Emmert, Elisabeth: *Jagdwende: Vom Edelhobby zum ökologischen Handwerk* Munich: Beck 1998.

31 See also the contributions to the magazine of the Ecological Hunting Association, e.g. *Öko-Jagd* 2/2021, p. 5–19.

32 "Wölfe und Weidetierhaltung—wie geht es weiter?", press release, 16.09.2021, in: *Öko-jagd* 4/2021, p. 45.

33 For more details, see Gieser, Thorsten: 'Hunting wild animals in Germany: conflicts between wildlife management and 'traditional' practices of Hege', in: Michaela Fenske/Bernhard Tschöfen (eds.), *Managing the Return of the Wild: Human Encounters with Wolves in Europe*. London: Routledge 2020, pp. 164–179.

to the practice of herding or shepherding, this relationship is based on practices of care. Although hunters do not own the ‘ownerless’ game, they have a so-called right of appropriation, provided the game is in their hunting district, and thus a certain claim to dominance over these animals. Their relationship with game is therefore an ambivalent one, characterised by care and responsibility for its welfare on the one hand and a claim to dominance with the right to ‘pursue’—to hunt and kill—the game on the other. Despite this ambivalence, their relationship with game is, from their point of view, quite positive: Hunters identify with their hunting district and the animals in it; they are interested in the welfare of their game population in general and want to promote it (so that individual animals can be killed without endangering hunting as a whole or the population); they are fascinated by animal behaviour and enjoy observing it (the so-called *Anblick*), they improve the habitat of their game by artificially creating wallows or by cultivating crop fields, and they protect their game from (human) poachers and (animal) predators.

The latter refers to the category of animals that pose a threat to ‘their’ game: the *Raubwild* (‘predators’), from birds of prey to martens, badgers, foxes, and wolves. For predators, there is basically no duty of care and so the ambivalence of the hunter-animal relationship no longer applies: it is reduced to the hunting of predators, that is, to the killing of an animal seen primarily as a pest (or ‘plague’, as in the opening quote). And the wolf is a predator par excellence (all the more so as it is a danger not only to game, but also to their beloved hunting dogs and possibly even to humans)! The relationship with the wolf in hunting practice and hunting tradition is thus clearly defined. It is a negative relationship, somewhere between simple **dislike** and intense **hostility**. The ‘proper’ way to deal with the wolf is hunting and population regulation (to a minimum level), and the appropriate behaviour of the wolf towards hunters (and humans in general) is shyness (as an expression of respect and fear of the apex predator humans).

Whether it is the DJV in Germany,³⁴ the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE) at the European level,³⁵ or the International Coun-

34 https://www.landesjagdverband.de/fileadmin/Medien/LJV/Dokumente/Raubwild/DJ-V-Positionspapier_Wolf_BJT__19_06_15_wolffinal.pdf (accessed: 30.04.2024).

35 <https://www.face.eu/2019/10/green-light-for-hunting-as-a-management-tool-for-wolf/> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

cil for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) at international level,³⁶ hunting organisations everywhere are actively lobbying to (re)classify the wolf as hunt-able game, to abolish its protected status, and to start regular hunting. The plan ‘Wildlife Management Wolf’ of the Action Alliance Forum Nature (under the leadership of the DJV) clearly defines the individual steps:

1. Amendment of the Federal Nature Conservation Act with the possibility of applying ‘protective hunting’ as a regular exception to §45.
2. Inclusion of the wolf in the hunting laws of the federal states with a simultaneous year-round closed season.
3. Conversion of the year-round closed season into an open hunting season.³⁷

In order to achieve this goal, the hunting associations, together with the hunting media, are launching a massive attack on wolf management and wolf science, questioning their credibility and sowing mistrust: “DJV criticises intransparent, outdated wolf figures”; “DJV calls for active wolf management”; “BfN presents study on possible wolf territories. DJV warns against misuse of scientific data”.³⁸ In my more than six years of field research experience with hunters in Germany (first on the relationship between hunters and animals in general, then on wolves, currently on wild boar), I have regularly encountered these arguments in informal conversations during and after social hunts and in interviews with hunters. The formation of opinion on the wolf issue

36 The CIC is—like the DJV—one of the co-initiators of the following wolf management plan of the Action Alliance Forum Nature.

37 <https://www.pferd-aktuell.de/shop/wildtiermanagement-wolf-handlungsvorschlag.html> (accessed: 30.04.2024, translated by TG).

38 Headlines on the DJV homepage of 02.12.2019 (<https://www.jagdverband.de/djv-kritisiert-intransparente-veraltete-wolfszahlen>), 30. 10.2020 (<https://www.jagdverband.de/djv-fordert-aktives-wolfsmanagement>) and 06.05.2020 (<https://www.jagdverband.de/bfn-legt-studie-zu-moeglichen-wolfsterritorien-vor>). Accessed: 30.04.2024.; on hunting media coverage, e.g. “10 Irrglauben zum Wolf—Oft behauptet, aber gar nicht wahr”, in: *Jäger* 12/2017, p. 29–31, “Wölfe in Deutschland—Obergrenze für Isegrim?”, in: *Wild und Hund* 3/2017, p. 14–21, “Bilanz für einen Rückkehrer—Heimkehrer Wolf in Deutschland”, in: *Pirsch* 1/2016, pp. 24–32, “Wolfspolitik—Eiertanz um Isegrim”, in: *Wild und Hund* 15/2020, pp. 60–65; a wolf special issue in *Jäger* 7/2022 titled: “Wolfsjagd!—Jetzt wird’s ernst” and “Raubwildplage—Tipps und Tricks zum Wolfsmanagement”, p. 24–39; *Wild und Hund* 11/2022 headlined “Wölfe in Deutschland—Feuer frei auf Isegrim?”, p. 56.

within the hunting community is often conspicuously oriented towards the representations of the DJV and the hunting media.

But let's leave the level of public discourse and look at the direct relationship between hunters and wolves. Let's start with a driven hunt on the military training ground Oberlausitz—where the first wolf in Germany settled more than twenty years ago and where hunters have a lot of experience of hunting game in the presence of wolves. When welcoming the hunters (from all over Germany), the hunting leader from the National Forestry Agency also talks about the wolf:

I must point out to you that wolves may be present during the hunt. As a rule, the wolf is more uncomfortable with you being there than the other way round. All wolves react differently: some wolves leave the hunt when things get turbulent, others just stay there. In any case, the beaters should draw attention to themselves and that is why we unleash the dogs a little later than usual.

If you have your dog on a leash and a wolf takes an interest in your dog, which can happen, drive it away with loud clapping, shouting, whatever. [...] And if you are still unsure, better lock your dog in the car. If your dog doesn't want to leave his place, let him stay with you. Dogs know what they are doing and can usually assess the danger. If you feel your dog is interested in wolves, put him back in the car. If your dog points out wolves to you, do not reward him for it. He should not have a positive association with wolves. If wolves are already on the prey, then they have won and we let them have it. However, I assume that most of you will not see any wolves today [...].³⁹

As it turned out, quite a few hunters had actually seen wolves during the hunt that day. At the *Schüsseltreiben*, the communal meal after the hunt, the hunters stood in small groups and talked about the hunt and what they had seen. It is customary on these occasions to talk about the *Anblick* ('sight') one had. Sightings of wolves were joined by sightings of red deer, roe deer, and wild boar, and for most hunters it didn't seem all that unusual or worrying. However, one young female hunter with a small hunting dog had had a rather disturbing encounter with wolves. She was posted on a high hunting blind, with her dog waiting on the ground below. At some point during the hunt, a whole pack of

39 transcript of the speech, field notes, 13.12.2020.

wolves came and settled about 30 metres away from her, watching her and staying for almost half an hour. After a few minutes she found it so disturbing that she climbed down and took her dog up into the hunting blind with her. The next day she took him up to the blind with her from the start.

This example shows that hunters are in a special situation that distinguishes them from others and partly explains their special attitude towards wolves. They are the ones most likely to have a real encounter with wolves. They go to the same places as the wolves when they go hunting. They are there at the same time as the wolves, that is, at dusk, at night, and at dawn. They engage in the same activity—hunting—and they hunt the same animals: red deer, roe deer, and wild boar. Under these circumstances, encounters are inevitable and can take more or less disturbing forms from the hunters' point of view: Sightings at a distance, encounters directly at the hunting blind, encounters with a hunting dog, and encounters at the shot animal (also during the 'follow-up search' for shot and wounded animals with a specialist dog). In the example above, I described how most hunters accepted sightings (at a distance) quite calmly. But there were always encounters that caused excitement—even if nothing actually happened (but who knows what could happen). This is also the case in the following account of a hunter during a driven hunt on the military training ground a year earlier:

I showed Mr X [from the National Forestry Agency] a photo of a wolf from the last driven hunt in November 2018. I photographed him from two metres away. He came straight at me. He saw me at 50 metres. It was clear, we looked into each other's eyes. He came within two metres of me [...] while I was standing on the raised platform [...] and marking in front of the platform and then he turned around, he turned his back on me, he didn't even look at me anymore, and I could see him for another ten minutes as he walked away calmly. They are the only animals in the forest that behave like that, I'm sorry [...].⁴⁰

When listening to hunters' accounts of their encounters with wolves, it is striking how often the focus of their stories is on the (to them) abnormal behaviour. Wolves do not behave like other game, not in the way that animals are known to behave: "You have to differentiate: There are predators and wild boar or other

40 Interview, Lord Mayor of Bautzen/hunter, from Saxony, 16.12.2019.

game that are not predators. And a predator is unpredictable, has free will and is intelligent".⁴¹

Wolves seem to have a mind of their own and do not appear to simply follow instinctive behavioural automatisms. They are not even shy, as one would expect from a wild animal—that is, they do not immediately flee when they perceive humans. This is something hunters find very **disturbing**. They usually mention that wolves are 'disrespectful' by not showing shyness. In the example of the encounter on the raised platform, the wolf comes straight up to the hunter, although he has seen him (instead of fleeing head over heels), then marks his territory on the platform (as if to provoke) and turns his back on him (you can't do anything to me anyway!) without 'dignifying' the hunter with a glance. The wolf is thus perceived by the hunter as an animal that does not recognise the superior dominance of the hunter in 'his' territory and simply ignores him. It seems to be a kind of affront.

And this affront is all the more disturbing because hunters, more than any other people I have spoken to in the course of my research, consider wolves to be dangerous. No one else considers wolves to be so dangerous, to game, hunting dogs and even to humans. This alleged danger of wolves to humans is, of course, often used as an argument in the political battle to introduce wolf hunting and therefore needs to be critically questioned. But it seems plausible to me to assume that the hunters are not using this argument for purely political reasons: In their eyes, wolves really are truly dangerous or, in the word of a hunter at a public event I attended, they are *Bestien* ('beasts', although the German word has even more dangerous undertones than the English one—more like 'bestial'). For some, this simply leads to increased caution and vigilance:

[HUNTER:] Basically, I don't want to have anything to do with the wolf. I grew up here in a cultivated landscape where you are at the top of the food chain. And when I was in Africa for the first time and I felt the presence of large predators, I thought to myself, oh, you didn't know that feeling yet. And now I have that here on my doorstep and I have to say it took me a year to get used to it. Now it's routine for me to look at the woods, the fields, the edges of the woods when I walk the dog outside.

[INTERVIEWER:] So you also feel threatened yourself.

41 Interview, hunters, southern Brandenburg, 12.10.2019.

[HUNTER:] Yes, I don't feel comfortable with the wolf. I have two terriers. Watson is a cosy, small terrier, nine years old. I also have the opposite, a Border Terrier, two years old, Idefix, who would also mess with big dogs, [...] I know he would also mess with wolves [...]. If I'm out alone in the hunting area and I have my Idefix with me and a wolf comes and attacks us or he's standing in front of me growling, what do I do then? There's nothing I can do. If I take Idefix in my arms, the [wolf] might jump on my arm, I don't know. There have been hunting dogs killed by wolves in Germany.

[INTERVIEWER:] One, right?

[HUNTER:] According to official figures! (Laughter). Up here in the Westerwald, when you drive up here, around Rettersen, in Leuscheid, where many spruce forests have been cleared in the meantime. When I ask the local hunters who come to our driven hunt, [...] I can't get a dog handler to let his dogs jump around [...], I can't get any hunters, they only come with handguns. [...] Yes, really [...].⁴²

Although there has not been a single documented wolf attack on a human in Germany, and only one hunting dog has been killed by a wolf in a non-hunting situation, the hunting media, in particular, are fanning the flames of suspicion about these figures and regularly publish reports of alleged attacks on hunters and hunting dogs.⁴³ A certain **atmosphere of fear** of wolves is therefore widespread among the hunting community (especially in non-wolf regions)—although not everyone shares this and some consider it exaggerated.

Apart from encounters with wolves, hunters are also **concerned** about the mere presence of wolves in their hunting grounds and the effect this has on 'their' game, 'their' hunting grounds, and hunting as a whole. According to hunters, game is behaving differently and has become unpredictable, making hunting more difficult. Roe deer have become more stealthy, rarely showing themselves, and the population has declined considerably. Red deer and wild boar have formed huge *Angstrudel*/*Angstrotten* ('herds of fear') to protect themselves from the wolf, causing massive damage to forests and fields by their sheer numbers. It is difficult to shoot out individual animals, and so

42 Interview, hunter, from Rhineland-Palatinate, 05.07.2021.

43 For example: "Lebensgefahr? – Jagdhunde im Wolfsrevier", in: Wild und Hund 11/2015, p. 30–35.

hunting bags in the area are decreasing and management plans cannot be fulfilled. These are some of the most common concerns of hunters with hunting grounds in wolf territory.⁴⁴ In turn, these circumstances make the hunting grounds unattractive: Hunters wonder why they should pay several thousand euros per year for such hunting grounds. Landowners who want to rent out hunting grounds cannot find tenants. This was also the case with the Lord Mayor of Bautzen (himself a hunter), who had problems renting out the town forest:

We are in the process of renting out our town forest again. It's 1500 hectares of forest and mountain. Until a few years ago, it was one of the richest game habitats in East Saxony and I was telling someone, a wolf advocate, at the weekend that we only shot the first roebuck this year in a driven hunt in November, which is extremely unusual for this area. [...] Three years ago it was like this, you could go out in the evening and know that you would be back home in two hours because you had three or four deer of which you had chosen the right one to shoot. Now, as I said, in the whole hunting year we only shot the first roebuck only in November during the driven hunt. This is extremely unusual. There were only very few roe deer before that, much fewer than in previous years. And that was right at the end of the lease. To date, we have not received a single application in response to the call for applications. This is also very unusual, because this is actually a very beautiful area, also very scenic [...].⁴⁵

Overall, the Lord Mayor sees the wolf ultimately as a threat to hunting itself and the hunting tradition:

Of course, on the one hand it is nice to see that the wolves could survive if we did not hunt them. But this has a noticeable effect on our hunting tradition. I find that quite alarming. Hunting is [...] a tradition as old as mankind itself. Of course, in a cultural landscape it is subject to very strong restrictions, and in Germany it is extremely strictly regulated. All this is justified. But today we have hunting districts where hunting is in principle almost hopeless, where there is no chance of shooting anything with any regularity [...]. All in all, the hunters feel that hunting has become more difficult because of the wolves,

44 Interview, hunter, from Rhineland-Palatinate, 27.04.2020 or interview, three hunters, from Brandenburg, 29.07.2021, see also "Folgen für die Jagd – Wenn er da ist", in: *Wild und Hund* 12/2016, pp. 16–22.

45 Interview, Lord Mayor of Bautzen/hunter, from Saxony, 16.12.2019.

and of course it annoys them when they have to hear that this is not true at all, don't make such a fuss, share something with the wolves [...] You can't do anything. I'm not in favour of eradicating the wolves either, but I think we have such a dense population that it can't do any harm if they are now treated according to hunting law, that they can be shot at certain times.⁴⁶

The conflict with the wolf thus seems to be part of a larger conflict that has pre-occupied the hunting community for decades. They **feel under constant attack** from society as a whole, from the state and especially from conservationists.⁴⁷ Hunters seem to be **under constant pressure to justify themselves**. Since the 1970s, not only have basic hunting traditions such as trophy hunting or its *Hege* practices been criticised⁴⁸, but in the last two decades, hunting itself has also come under public scrutiny. The ethics of animal protection and animal welfare are increasingly being discussed and are no longer a minority position but have found their way into the majority of society. One could say with Michaela Fenske and Marlis Heyer that we are visibly and tangibly redefining our relationship to animals at the beginning of the twenty-first century.⁴⁹ Not only is the consumption of animal products no longer taken for granted, but so is the killing of animals, and therefore hunting. Although the number of hunters in Germany is steadily increasing, many hunters **feel that they are socially pilloried and disrespected**. Even the *Grauhund* ('grey hound', a.k.a. wolf) is apparently preferred to the *Grünrock* ('green robe', a.k.a. hunter), as a commentator in the *Deutsche Jagdzeitung* puts it:

No, it is not a question of painting the devil on the wall. And the government is probably not aiming for a large-scale 'disposal' of the German hunting community. But: The incidents mentioned in the article are neither isolated cases nor comprehensible. Strange. And we remember wolves with Italian or French 'passports' that first appeared in NRW or Brandenburg. After thousands of kilometres of migration along motorways and past large cities. They came as if out of nowhere. That is also strange. And then there

46 Interview, Lord Mayor of Bautzen/hunter, from Saxony, 16.12.2019.

47 See the cover topic on hunting opponents of *Jäger* magazine 4/2017, announced on the cover as: "Jagen in postfaktischen Zeiten – Ende der Idylle"; "Drohkulissen: Wer unsere Gegner sind"; "Wahlchancen: Wo die Grünen wegmüssen"; "Kampagnen: Wie wir uns endlich wehren".

48 W. Bode/E. Emmert: Jagdwende.

49 M. Fenske/M. Heyer: Wer zum Haushalt gehört.

are the Greens. In more and more state governments, they are hogging the hunting issue. Then they cobble together new laws that castrate hunting. In return, Isegrim⁵⁰ is treated to a contemporary culture of welcome. Strange indeed.⁵¹

Anger at 'the Greens' is compounded by **envy** of the wolf. From the hunters' point of view, wolves are 'canonised', 'untouchable', and are allowed to live as they please. Wolves are obviously valued more highly than the actual game species of the hunters—even when they are, for example, wiping out the mouflon sheep in the Königshain mountains between Bautzen and Görlitz, which were reintroduced by hunters over a hundred years ago.⁵² In addition, wolves are allowed to spread unhindered, while the hunters' beloved red deer are restricted to a few designated red deer areas.⁵³ Wolves are given preferential treatment, to the detriment of native game, and the hunters themselves.

So, there are many reasons why hunters might get upset about wolves and get involved in the conflict against them. But for some hunters (especially in non-wolf areas) this is all too much, and they don't want to have anything to do with the wolf at all. They prefer to stay out of it and just go hunting. The reason for this is that hunters in general feel potentially threatened if they get involved in any way with wolf issues. Wolf advocates might turn up in their hunting district and snoop around, saw through the posts of hunting blinds or even threaten to sue.⁵⁴ As with the shepherds, there is a **diffuse sense of anxiety** in the hunting community of being targeted by these wolf friends. Almost every hunter has heard these stories, in which the diffuse anxiety also had very concrete causes. A hunter from the Leuscheid Pack territory, for example, was the first to tell me about the diffuse atmosphere of anxiety caused by the wolf advocates:

What do I do if a wolf comes at me? I really just run—I sent X a photo—there is my little PKK [pistol], I have it with me, it fits in my jacket pocket. And if

50 Isegrim is a cultural reference to a wolf character in the well-known fable of *Reinicke Fuchs*.

51 "Komisch. Grauhund statt Grünrock?", DJZ online from 14.01.2016. <https://djz.de/komisch-grauhund-statt-gruenrock-3777/> (accessed: 30.04.2024, translated by TG).

52 Interview, Lord Mayor of Bautzen/hunter, from Saxony, 16.12.2019; "Muffelwild—Verschwinden vorprogrammiert", in: *Wild und Hund* 5/2022, p. 14–20.

53 Interview, District Hunting Master, from Rhineland-Palatinate, 18.02.2020.

54 Interview, two hunters, from Rhineland-Palatinate, 02.03.2020.

I just fire a warning shot into the ground. [...] But my difficulty is that there is no objective way to deal with it. You can be sure that even if I'm out in the woods with my dog [...] and the wolf attacks my dog or threatens to attack my dog and I feel I have to defend myself and shoot the wolf, then I can be one hundred percent sure that I will definitely be reported to the police because someone will accuse me, even if I didn't want to, of deliberately trying to kill the wolf because it's a thorn in my side. It's as certain as the Amen in church that this would happen, because there is no objective way of dealing with it any more. As a hunter, I now always have to be afraid that if I have anything to do with the wolf, I will be sued and then I [...] will have a trial. I don't need that. It's no longer a rational way of dealing with things.⁵⁵

But then there are also these concrete, non-hypothetical events that fuel this anxiety:

And then two weeks later I was sitting in the hunting blind at night to hunt sows, I think it was 11 p.m., and then I saw, just after I sat down there, I saw people walking across the fields with a torch and shining it into the hunting blind and into the next hunting blind and the next one. Then they stood in front of my hunting blind and said, Are you X? And I said, Yes [...] who wants to know? I thought it was one of the locals, because I actually have a good relationship with the people there, and then I got the answer: 'Watch what you do with the wolf. We're watching you', and then they went away. And I don't need that, I don't need that. They've already slashed my tyres twice and scratched my car and sawed the legs off my hunting blinds. [...] I don't use violence or threats, that's against my nature, with me it's always [...] on a factual basis you can talk to each other and if you disagree, then that's the way it is. But this was really transgressive in a way [...] I didn't tell my wife either, she would never let me out again because she would be afraid for me.⁵⁶

Let us summarise what has been said so far about the ethos of hunters in relation to the wolf: It is typically characterised by a certain anxiety or even fear of (potential or actual) threats from wolf friends; envy of the wolf as an animal that is treated as if it were above one's own game; a general feeling of being blamed and attacked by conservationists and society at large, including the feeling of constantly having to justify oneself as a hunter; Worries about the loss of hunting traditions and hunting itself; worries about the impact of the

55 Interview, hunter, from Rhineland-Palatinate, 05.07.2021.

56 Interview, hunter, from Rhineland-Palatinate, 05.07.2021.

wolf's presence on their hunting district and on 'their' game in terms of their *Hege* relationship; aversion to hostility towards the wolf as a predator; and fear of the wolf as a potential danger to their own lives when hunting.

With this in mind, it is easier to understand why there may be strong **feelings of aggression**, or even **hatred** towards wolves within the hunting community. This hatred is fed by the whole range of affects outlined here. It includes feelings towards the wolf, of course, but also feelings towards other social actors, and finally it feeds on the general ethos of how it feels to be a hunter today. In this hatred, the various elements of this affective arrangement mix, reinforce each other, and create the basis for a final possibility: the illegal killing of wolves:

To put it bluntly: this is how we do it. Full stop. In the past, there would have been no wolves at all; the old foresters would have said: 'Gentlemen, this area is wolf-free. I don't want to hear anything more about it'. That would have been settled quietly [...]. That's why this is so symptomatic of this passivity [...]. You only have to ask why the wolves were exterminated in the past. If you know that, you also know that it must be the same today. You don't need to get tangled up in the details [...]. You just have to argue with common sense. And then they bring in the wolves. And the hunters put up with that too [...].⁵⁷

Here we have the wounded pride, the lost claim to dominance, the need to endure, the dangerousness of the wolves, the wisdom of the old hunters, and the clear, uncompromising action that would provide the solution. The hunter and hunting lawyer Dr. Heiko Granzin is more radical in his hatred. Among other things, he informs hunters about the limits of the legality of shooting wolves in articles in the *Deutsche Jagdzeitung* and offers his legal assistance to those who need it (like the Dutch hunter who shot a wolf during a driven hunt in Brandenburg and was represented in court by lawyer Granzin):

'For my sake, let the greyhound go to hell!' Can I say that? Yes, I can! My profession does not deprive me of the right to free speech, and it makes no difference whether PETA or completely confused wolf-huggers wish the plague on me. As a hunter, dog handler, hobby animal keeper, and non-association official, I don't have to 'howl with the wolves' and babble out hypocritical slogans like, 'The hunters' association XY welcomes the return of the wolf'.

57 Interview, hunter, from Hesse, 02.11.2019.

No—whenever I read somewhere that one of the greys has been crushed to a pulp on the motorway, a smile flits across my face. But road traffic alone will not stop the ongoing population explosion of this hunting moocher. So why not just pick up a gun? Quite simply: because it is not (yet) legal. But it is not completely forbidden either [...].⁵⁸

If this hatred is accompanied by the right opportunity and the means are available, it is not far to the illegal killing of a wolf, as a hunter from the Lausitz region explained to me after the interview (when the recorder was switched off).⁵⁹ It happens when you are hunting wild boar at night, when you are sitting in the dark for hours anyway. Suddenly a young wolf appears instead of a sow (it's always the pups or yearlings, the adults aren't that stupid). Then you seize the opportunity and shoot it. After all, you are well equipped with night vision technology—including the illegal one you got from Dutch hunting guests. No, he has no problems with his game stock, it's great. And no, he has no problems with wolves, he says with a grin.

Get rid of that passivity, get rid of tolerating everything that the Greens, PETA, and others put in front of you, stop swallowing everything quietly, but become active again yourself, solve the problems yourself, assert your claim to dominance in your own territory, make the wolf a huntable game animal, as it has always been, and kill the wolf, as hunters have always done. After all, it is dangerous and a threat to the game you are protecting. Restore 'normality'.

It is the possible extremes of the hunters' affective world that I ultimately wanted to highlight here. Based on six years of research with hunters, I believe that the causes of these feelings and sentiments are widespread; their extremes are not. I hope to have shown that several factors can contribute to the escalation of affective dynamics towards heightened feelings of aggression and hatred. However, these same factors can also help to calm and reduce them.

58 "Notwehr gegen Wolf: Wenn Isegrim die Zähne fletscht", in: DJZ 1/2019, p. 8–9, translated by TG.

59 Interview, hunter, from Saxony, 09.03.2022. Yet it remains difficult to assess how serious he really was with his statement. Was he just venting or talking about the possibility? Research into the matter of illegal killings are inherently difficult, see von Essen, Erica/Hansen, Hans-Peter/Peterson, Nils/Peterson, Tarla: 'Discourses on illegal hunting in Sweden: the meaning of silence and resistance', *Environmental Sociology*, 4 (2018), pp. 370–380, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2017.1408446>.

“They touch something deep inside me”: wolf friends and wolves

Figure 25: Waiting for wolves in Upper Lusatia



Source: Author

At a vantage point near Hoyerswerda, Lusatia.

I am in the ‘Mecca’ of wolf friends in Germany, in the territory of the Knap-penrode-Seenland Pack, where probably more wolves have been sighted than in any other place in Germany—probably more wolves than in any other place in Europe. Wolf friends of all kinds can be found here at any time of the year, but especially in the summer months when the pups have left the den and are out and about with the older ones. With naked eyes, binoculars, spotting scopes, or cameras, they keep an eye out for wolves at dawn and dusk. Sometimes there are just a few of them, sometimes up to twenty, standing in a dense row at the very front, their equipment and camping chairs set up, supplied with food and drink, well wrapped up and reasonably protected from the cold in winter, sprayed with Autan to ward off mosquitoes in summer. They stand or sit there for hours, mostly in silence, often without seeing a wolf. Some are happy to see a deer, a wild boar, the cranes, a nightjar, or an osprey. The locals here usually already know each other and greet each other with the question: “Have you seen anything yet? Have any wolves been here yet?” Among them are enthusiastic wolf fans who seem to spend a lot of their free time here; nature enthu-

siasts who have found their way to the wolf late in life, or simply people from the neighbouring village who cycle past to see if they can spot a wolf; or the cook from Hoyerswerda who spends his lunch break here in the hope of seeing something; or the shift worker who feels drawn here after work. They are joined by wolf friends who travel from all over Germany. Some come from Berlin for a weekend trip to Lusatia, others stay for a week or two. Still others have booked a tourist wolf seminar or a few days with one of the local nature guides. Most of the time it is quiet here, or you can hear a low whisper from those standing next to you. But when suddenly someone shouts “THERE!”, cameras are frantically waved, followed by almost desperate cries of “WHERE? WHERE? I SEE NOTHING!”, then life comes to the group and joy breaks out! (Unless it was just a hare or a deer that was mistaken for a wolf from a distance.)⁶⁰

As can be seen from this short vignette, there are—similar to shepherds and hunters—different types of wolf friends. These are not necessarily fundamentally different, but in some respects, they are so different that I will explicitly mention the differences where necessary. They are most visible at the organisational level, where the wolf friends can be found in animal welfare, species conservation, and nature conservation organisations. Animal welfare activists (for example, *Wolfsschutz Deutschland e.V.*) care for and appreciate every single wolf. Because the wolf is important to them as an individual, their relationship with wolves often takes on a deep, personal, and intensely affective character, which is less pronounced in the other two types of organisations. The focus of species conservationists (e.g. the *Gesellschaft zum Schutz der Wölfe e.V.*—GzSdW) is the wolf as a species. Caring for the species can then mean ‘sacrificing’ individual wolves for the preservation of the species (which in turn is unthinkable for animal welfare activists). Finally, conservationists (e.g. NABU) focus on larger ecological contexts in which an individual species only acquires its significance in the network of relationships with other species and their overarching importance for a habitat or ecosystem.

Species conservation and nature conservation usually go hand in hand (but with different emphases) and in their own understanding they distance themselves mainly from the animal welfare movement, which they see as too ‘radical’. Conversely, species and nature conservation often does not seem to go far enough for the animal welfare activists. In the case of wolves, it is clear that species and nature conservation organisations are well networked—also with

60 Reconstruction of a ‘typical day’ at the lookout based on field notes from three years.

corresponding organisations of livestock owners or (ecological) hunters, as I have already shown above. Animal welfare activists, on the other hand, tend to be rather isolated and marginalised in the public debate (although they are networked with other animal welfare activists, such as PETA or anti-hunting organisations). During my fieldwork, it was striking that animal welfare activists were the only group that nobody wanted to have anything to do with. I have already mentioned the threat scenarios attributed to them by sheep farmers and hunters.

It is also important to note that wolf friends are generally the most heterogeneous of the three groups of actors. It is not a community of practice like the sheep farmers or hunters who, despite different social backgrounds, develop common norms, values, sentiments, and ethos through a shared practice (of hunting, shepherding). Wolf friends are united primarily by their shared relationship with the wolf, although there is a loose bundle of practices that many share and that provide opportunities for sociality, such as touristic wolf trips, visits to wolf enclosures, reading wolf books, attending lectures or public events or 'wolf seminars', and so on.

So what does it feel like to be a wolf friend—in this time, in this society, with wolves? In order to portray the ethos of wolf friends, I will refer mainly to the sentiments and feelings of three individuals, as their stories express not only their interesting personal relationship with wolves, but also 'typical' elements that are characteristic of wolf friends in general. The first is Jörg, owner of a dog training school, formerly a dog trainer in the German army, and for many years active in nature and species conservation. He is a member of the Senckenberg Society and the GzSdW, among others.⁶¹ Next is Willi, a NABU Wolf Ambassador who spent several years volunteering as a Large Carnivore Officer in Rhineland-Palatinate. He was an intensive care nurse and still works in the care sector. He is also a keen outdoor sportsman.⁶² Finally, there is Nicole, who volunteers on the GzSdW board. She has been riding since she was a girl and has learned to love nature on cross-country rides all over Europe. For her, being active and involved with wolves in her work for the GzSdW is a balance to her day job as an accountant.⁶³

The best way to explore the ethos of wolf friends is to start with the basics: a felt connection to nature. People who are **fascinated** by wolves are rarely fasci-

61 For all quotes below: Interview, 06.07.2020.

62 For all quotes below: interview, 08.11.2019.

63 For all quotes below: Interview, 08.07.2020.

nated by wolves alone. They are usually fascinated by a wide variety of animals, both wild and domesticated (especially *companion animals*, such as dogs and horses).⁶⁴ They also tend to **love nature** in general and find **joy in experiencing nature**:

I am someone who has been in touch with nature all my life. Even as a child, I found nature pleasant. But I really came to the wolf through the dog. [...] It was because I wanted to understand my dog better. The wolf is a wild animal and the dog is a domesticated pet. And because I was interested in the dog, its whole behaviour, I went to the roots, and the roots are the wolf. (Jörg)

The subject of wolves has always been with me, even in my youth. They have always been animals that have fascinated me. They are such social animals. I come from a social environment, also professionally [...]. Somehow, I thought, this couldn't be true—in 2012 a wolf came to the Westerwald and was shot—that such an animal could come here from Italy and then be shot. That was a reason for me to do something in this direction. (Willi)

This is a difficult question to answer because I have always found wolves great. I have to go back a long way. The point is that for as long as I can remember, even as a little girl, I thought wolves were great. When we went to the zoo, I can well remember that my parents couldn't get me away from the wolf enclosure. [...] I suppose one of my favourite animals was dogs, which I knew from my personal environment; I didn't have any myself, but there were dogs in the family, there were dogs in the neighbourhood, and I used to walk the neighbours' dogs when I was seven years old. And I think the wolf was like that [...], he had a sense of freedom. It was the big brother from the wild of my favourite animal, the dog. (Nicole)

In all three cases, you can see that the origins of the relationship with the wolf go back to childhood. It is rare for someone to develop a late relationship as an adult. For some it starts with the wolf, for some with the dog, for others with a general love of nature. Whatever the beginning, these three elements usually occur together (so it is not surprising that Willi also has a dog). The role of dogs in this context cannot be underestimated. The two representatives of the species *Canis lupus* create a **feeling of supposed familiarity and closeness**

64 For her, wolves accordingly have a 'nonhuman charisma', see Lorimer, Jamie: 'Non-human charisma', in: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25 (2007), pp. 911–932, <https://doi.org/10.1068/d71j>.

for both of them through their close (biological-genetic) relationship, conveyed through the dog.

The affective bond with the wolf can also increase when experiences of familiarity and closeness are combined with a kind of identification with the wolves. Willi already alluded to this in his statement when he compared the social, caring behaviour of the wolves with his own. For Nicole, this also plays a role:

And at the same time, I see a lot of parallels, also in the family, they have their territory, we have our home. They go hunting, we have our jobs. They have their children, we have our children. At some point, when they are sexually mature, the children leave the family, do something on their own, and also start a family. I think there are a lot of parallels.

So, it is not only the similarity between dogs and wolves that provides access to an affective relationship with wolves; wolf friends also see similarities between humans and wolves in their way of life and their sociality. Both forms of similarity, however, are not similarities between equals: The dog is the wolf's 'little brother' and the wolf friend also looks up to the wolf in some way. Nicole was more explicit about this admiration:

And I think that's also, that's really a very emotional level that I have there, where I really notice that I tend to overreact a bit. It's such an ideal that people read into it. A symbol of wilderness, a symbol of freedom, and at the same time I see that they still live in a family. I think that's what fascinates me about them. This strength and power and this freedom to live in harmony with nature, which we as humans can no longer manage, and the wolf does this quite naturally, as do many other animals, of course.

The last sentence of this quote adds an important qualification to my characterisation of wolf friends as nature-loving (and this clearly distinguishes them from the shepherds and hunters who also see themselves as nature-loving!).

Wolf friends feel close to nature and at the same time alienated from nature.⁶⁵

More precisely, they perceive themselves—on a personal-individual level—as

65 I understand alienation with Hartmut Rosa as a "specific form of world relationship in which subject and world are indifferent or hostile (repulsive) to each other and thus inwardly disconnected" (Rosa, Hartmut: *Resonanz. Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 2016, p. 316, translated by TG).

nature-loving but shaped by a society that is perceived as alienated from nature (in this respect, shepherds and hunters tend to distinguish between nature-loving rural people and nature-alienated city dwellers).⁶⁶ Their closeness to nature is therefore ‘disturbed’, as Jörg explains using the example of dog training:

In my opinion, we humans in our consumer society are not capable of raising a dog in a way that is reasonably appropriate to the species. Very few people can do that in our throwaway society. [...] If something doesn't work, it's usually thrown away immediately and the dog goes to an animal shelter or is beaten or something else.

Willi also believes that our society's relationship with nature is disturbed—for him, the illegal shooting of the wolf Pier-Luigi in the Westerwald in 2012 was an expression of this (see his first quote above)—and he wanted to get involved. There was also something wrong with society's image of animals, as Jörg had already experienced as a child:

When I finally got involved with the wolf, it confirmed what I had always suspected as a child. As a child, I had to go against what the adults knew. When I was little, they said that animals were stupid and had no feelings. So, in the past you only looked at animals from the outside and didn't see their inner life [...].

The affective bond between wolf friends and wolves therefore depends crucially on seeing wolves as having an ‘inner life’, an affective world to which they can relate, so that they can affect and be affected by each other. Yet even wolf friends sometimes find it difficult to publicly acknowledge wolves as sentient subjects. The whole wolf debate is very much characterised by a rational, scientific image of wolves, which makes it difficult to treat wolves as subjects. It would too quickly be perceived as ‘irrational’, and so this aspect is usually raised in private (or it is voiced by animal welfare activists, for whom the recognition of animal subjectivity is central).

The paradox of feeling both close to and alienated from nature ultimately leads them to have a **longing for a more natural life**. One could also say for a ‘wilder’ life, a connection to nature understood as wilderness—in contrast

66 Interestingly, even the hunter from the big city typically sees himself as part of this nature-loving rural population qua his identity as a hunter!

to shepherds and hunters, for whom a nature ordered and controlled by humans, or understood as a cultural landscape, is central. While for shepherds and hunters, humans are still at the centre of their understanding of nature, for wolf friends, humans are only part of a positively perceived whole that is superior to them. With sociologist Hartmut Rosa, one could also say that wolf friends intensely feel the **basic ecological fear of modernity**, namely that nature as a resonance space (for an affective relationship) could fall silent, combined with the simultaneous **hope** that wild animals—and especially wolves as the epitome of wilderness par excellence—can make it resound again.⁶⁷

The return of the first wolves to Germany more than twenty years ago was therefore an affectively charged event for wolf friends that both allayed this basic fear and strengthened their hope for the possibility of a life in resonance with a wilder nature previously unknown in this country. Nicole recalled that time:

I remember very clearly when [biologist and documentary filmmaker] Sebastian Koerner's film of the pups on the military training ground in Saxony were shown on the news. I sat at home and was deeply moved emotionally because I couldn't believe that these animals were coming home to us again. That touched me like nothing else in my life, because I would never have thought that this could happen [...] in Siberia or Canada, yes [...] that took me away emotionally, in a positive sense [...].

As recently as the 1990s, no wolf friend could have imagined this. The longing for wolves was even greater then, because the geographical distance was greater: wolves existed in Siberia, Canada, or on the fringes of Europe. A NABU wolf ambassador from the Westerwald, for example, wanted to emigrate to Canada as a child (and had already tried to contact the Canadian embassy) to be close to the wolves.⁶⁸ Many wolf friends have therefore made expensive trips to Sweden, Slovakia, or Russia to experience what was not possible here in Germany. Jörg is also one of those who had his first encounter with wolves in a distant country—though in his case not during a wolf trip, but during his work as a soldier:

67 H. Rosa: *Resonanz*, pp. 453–472.

68 Interview, NABU Wolf Ambassador, from Rhineland-Palatinate, 09.07.2020.

In Canada, it wasn't one wolf, it was several. It was in Labrador. The US had a strategic bomber command stationed there and when I was there, there was half a metre, [a] metre of snow. We practised parachuting there with the Americans. Then we jumped, were blown away a bit by the wind, came down two or three kilometres away, and then fought our way back to X. And there were five wolves there. And there were four or five wolves there, they were timber wolves, they were all black. [...] They even followed us a bit, but always at a distance, and then we moved on. I'd say they were around us for half an hour, three quarters of an hour.

The return of the wolves to Germany has not only changed nature here, it has also 'rewilded' the cultural landscape. Above all, it offers wolf friends a previously unimaginable opportunity: to live close to the wolves and to be able to meet them 'in real life'—to feel and experience their closeness 'in the flesh':

This is the absolute highlight that everyone strives for. [...] of course, you only know people who have either already seen a wolf or not. And those who have already seen one still talk about it with the greatest enthusiasm years and years later. And those who haven't seen one yet, they all talk about it as the greatest thing they can imagine. That has a very, very high value. [...] But [...] I can't tell you what that does to motivation, because people say they protect what they know. And for me, nothing has changed because I was already committed to protecting them before, [...] for me it's now a golden treasure that I have, I don't need any more. [...] This feverish working towards it, this absolute wanting to have it, that's gone, because I have it [...]. I've always gone on all these trips thinking, hopefully it'll work out [and I'll see a wolf]. (Nicole)

Willi is the only one of the three who has never seen a wolf in the wild. He has also been to Lusatia as part of his wolf monitoring training, but apart from tracks in the sand and wolf scat he has seen nothing there. He also went on wolf trips to Slovakia and Russia to see wolves, but he had no success there either. All the more important for him was the encounter with a wolf in an enclosure during a wolf seminar at the Wolf Centre in Dörverden, where he was even able to touch a wolf. Although he does not see himself as a 'wolf cuddler', he could not resist showing a photo of himself scratching the belly of a polar wolf on the last slide of his presentation at the end of a public talk he gave in the Westerwald. As for Nicole, this encounter was also a kind of 'golden treasure' for him. So there seems to be something about direct encounters with wolves

that affects wolf friends more deeply than anything else, regardless of whether the encounter is just a longing in a wolf friend's life, or an actual experience that lingers in memory for a lifetime. We should therefore take a closer look at this experience. First with Nicole:

Yes, with the [nature guide] last year [...], I have tried for years in other places. I was in Slovakia once, then I was in northern Spain, both in wolf areas, we do trips every two or three years, which are organised by the members, and we go to a wolf territory, and I was there from the beginning. We tried it in the far east of Poland, in the Białowieża National Park, but it didn't work [...]. But I have to say that I had tried it twice before with Stephan [...] and then last year it worked for the first time. I have to say quite clearly that this experience is so emotionally charged for me that I couldn't tell you about it in peace. But it was just unbelievable [...], absolutely unbelievable for me. To actually stand there and look through the binoculars [...], and that was also a relatively long sighting. I always wished that if I ever saw a wolf, it wouldn't be a shoo-and-go! And to have somebody next to me saying, by the way, that was a wolf. That would be a nightmare. Seen, but not really perceived. Please not like that, I don't want that, I would have found that quite horrible. But somehow this wish was granted. We spent a total of about five or six minutes [...], at the closest point it was about four, five hundred metres. That's quite close.

A little later in the interview, she finally found the right words to describe the 'indescribable':

It was really very feverish, it was total longing and wanting to have an experience, with an incredible urge behind it [...]. I have to say quite clearly that in my whole life there has never been anything that has touched me as deeply as this wolf sighting, not by a long shot [...], it touches a part of our soul that is extremely primal, and I think that releases a special emotion [...]. It just appeals to a part of our inner being that has become very atrophied in our modern world, and I just find that it makes such a 'Whoa!' when it's addressed in this way, because it doesn't know that it's being addressed, [...] It's something deeply rooted in us and our actual humanity, not this functional thing that we have in the modern world, we used to be hunters and gatherers and part of the forest and the wilderness and the nature that we live in, and I think this emotional thing is this moment where for a fraction of our life or a moment we come back into a unity with something that we used to be one with, but today in the modern world we are no longer [...], this is a feeling of euphoria [...].

Jörg found it as difficult as Nicole did to find the words to describe this deeply moving experience, and first kept his description of his first wolf encounter in Germany, in Lusatia, short: “It was on a military training ground, I was walking along the path all alone, and suddenly a wolf stood there and looked at me, quite simply, and a short time later it disappeared”.

I then asked him if his encounters in Canada and in Lusatia had had any special meaning for him:

[JÖRG:] Yes, of course. When you love nature and animals in the wild, it always triggers something. I would say very pleasant feelings. I don't want to say it was a feeling of love, but at least it was a feeling of joy. Not a euphoric joy, a quiet joy, a confirmation. It was pleasant, and of course it still arouses curiosity.

[INTERVIEWER:] What do you mean by confirmation?

[JÖRG:] Well, confirmation that it has been said that free-roaming animals, in the wild, live much more quietly, more pleasantly, more contentedly than animals in an artificial world, as it is in our society. They don't need golden taps, they just need peace and quiet. If it's not about eating and being eaten, there is peace and contentment in nature, and I'd even say respect and love, which are no longer so present, or very little, in our artificial world. [...] For me it's always new excitement, experiencing something new, but it's always different what you experience. There is always a certain anticipation and a certain tension. I'm a very optimistic person, I have a lot of fun and laugh a lot, and when I go to the countryside and I get away from this accelerated society and this hectic pace and find myself in nature and then experience something pleasant [...] it's always nice, it's exciting and you always want to experience more of it.

An encounter with wolves thus offers wolf friends, as is impressively demonstrated here, a space for **resonance experiences**: “*the (momentary) shining forth, the lighting up of a connection to a source of strong valuations in a predominantly silent and often also repulsive world*”.⁶⁹ This experience of resonance is characterised by complex feelings (**pleasure, excitement, curiosity, anticipation, quiet joy, euphoria, Whoa!**) that are deeply affective and even transform the deep-seated dissatisfaction with living in the modern world (the functional, golden taps,

69 H. Rosa: Resonanz, p. 317 (translated by TC, emphasis added).

hectic, no respect, no love), with its sense of alienation, and instead bring to life a sense of connectedness. In other words, in resonance with the wild animal wolf, wolf friends can, as it were, feel themselves in their 'being-animal' and 'being-wild'.

For those who are simply wolf friends in private, their ethos may already be sufficiently described here. But even this group of people may sometimes have the **uneasy feeling** that the return of wolves is threatened and that there are wolf critics who want them dead. If one is a committed wolf friend and actively campaigns for wolves in the public sphere, then one certainly cannot avoid going into another dimension of that affective world, that which is fed by the social conflict with other groups of actors. The threat scenarios described above by shepherds and hunters are not one-sided. Some wolf friends also face hostility. Volunteers like Willi, who publicly campaigns for wolves, are often verbally attacked by livestock owners or hunters. In his opinion, this also affects the public relations work of NABU wolf ambassadors. Their work is considered particularly important in places where emotions are running high, but often there is no one to 'step into the lion's den' and do it. One Wolf Ambassador from North Rhine-Westphalia, for example, received a phone call from a hunter after an event, insulting her. The wolf biologists at the LUPUS Institute have also been insulted and threatened many times.⁷⁰ Among other things, hunters took them to court for using soft-catch traps to tag wolves as part of Saxony's state monitoring programme.⁷¹ A Large Carnivore Officer in the Westerwald was threatened with legal action for setting up camera traps for monitoring purposes. And the chairwoman of *Wolfsschutz Deutschland* reported that her tyres were slashed, and the bumper of her car damaged when she went into the territory of the Leuscheid Pack to check the fences of local sheep farmers.⁷²

Especially among animal welfare activists, there seems almost a **sense of being in a kind of 'state of war' with the wolf critics**, as can be seen regularly in various Facebook groups. Since every single wolf counts for them, so does every single sheep farmer, hunter, or other wolf critic. Inevitably, the conflict becomes personal and therefore more intense: wolves are deeply loved, and

70 Interview, biologist, from Saxony, 03.08.2020.

71 "Kein Vorsatz beim Einsatz von Fallen", *Jäger* 3/2016.

72 "RLP—Leuscheider Rudel: Angriff auf Vorstand von Wolfsschutz-Deutschland e. V. bei Recherche", *Wolfsschutz Deutschland*, 30.04.2022, <https://wolfsschutz-deutschland.de/2022/04/30/rlp-leuscheider-rudel-angriff-auf-vorstand-von-wolfsschutz-deutschland-e-v-bei-recherche/> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

when someone acts against these beloved animals, they provoke correspondingly **strong outrage, anger or even hatred**. This is especially true in the extreme case of the illegal killing of wolves, as can be seen from this commentary on an illegal killing published on the website of *Wolfsschutz Deutschland*:

I had always thought it was impossible that I could ever hate. But that has now changed, because I now I HATE the murderers of the wolves to the core. In the new [eastern German] states it seems to be all about getting their way, no matter by what means, they do not shy away from murder, lies, and spreading fake news. The wolf is a social, wonderful animal and has many advantages over humans. I'd rather meet a wolf than a human, especially the kind that are vicious, vile murderers, and there seem to be far too many of them in the East!!!! These murderers MUST be caught and punished severely, very severely, just murderers!!!!⁷³

For animal welfare activists, there is also not much difference between the illegal killing of a wolf and the legal 'removal' of a wolf. Both end in what they see as the unjust death of a beloved animal. Accordingly, legal removals are regularly challenged in court. In Lower Saxony, for example, the hatred directed at those responsible in such cases has ensured that removals are only made public to a limited extent before they are carried out, which has led to accusations that the Ministry of the Environment is acting in undue 'secrecy'.⁷⁴ This in turn fuels the conflict between the official wolf management and wolf protectionists in particular and wolf friends in general.

Despite these tense conflicts between wolf management on the one hand and livestock owners and hunters on the other, the return of wolves has been a cause for celebration for wolf friends. In recent years, however, their mood may have become a little **more depressed and worried** as the wolf critics have become more vocal and seem to have found a more sympathetic ear in the political arena. *Is the public mood turning against wolves and their friends?* One thing

73 Comment by Marga, 01.08.2018, 8:34 am, <https://wolfsschutz-deutschland.de/2018/07/11/grausame-toetung-einer-jungwoelfin-10-000-euro-belohnung-fuer-die-ergreifung-des-taeters-ausgesetzt/> (accessed 30.04.2024, translated by TG).

74 "Auskunftsklage zu Wolfs-Entnahmen—Doods: 'Von Geheimniskrämerei kann keine Rede sein'", Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Energie, Bauen und Klimaschutz, Presseinformation 149/2021, <https://www.umwelt.niedersachsen.de/startseite/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/auskunftsklage-zu-wolfs-entnahmen-doods-von-geheimniskramerei-kann-keine-rede-sein-206506.html> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

is clear: politics is an affective affair and affects are political, so it is not surprising that wolf management is also a kind of affect management. And that is the subject of the final chapter.

