

'The return of the wolf – is Scotland's psyche ready?'

He is What He is

I have often thought: "Isn't it a pity the old boy can't change his ways so as to be more tolerated by man? But, on the other hand, if he did so, he just would not be a wolf."

From *The Wolf in North American History* by Stanley Paul Young

When will Scottish Society be ready for the wolf?

Six people offered views. Alan Watson Featherstone and Steve Carver supported the idea that the wolf could return within their lifetime (before 2043 which was the date that Alan Watson Featherstone had suggested earlier in the day as a goal for the return of the wolf). Peter Taylor and Jeremy Usher Smith supported the idea that the wolf could return but after their life time. While Diana Brockbank and Steve Hull spoke against the idea of the return of the wolf – never!

Participants views

	Vote taken before the debate	Before the debate but are you prepared to change your mind ?	After the debate
Within my lifetime -2043	24	17	22
Beyond my lifetime – 2043 +	15	16 !	13
Never	4	2	4

Speakers contributions

Rick Minter – scene setting

The character of the wolf and our perceptions of it are created around its shadowy nature and its ability to set us on edge. There is a limit to which we might want to dilute this relationship with the wolf, and this in turn limits the extent to which we can reduce its fear factor.

How would Scotland's people feel, and Scotland's policy makers react, if there were a few remaining wolves in the country today, with the population on the threshold of viability?

The wolf could reinforce Scottish identity if the communication and tactics were appropriate.

Alan Watson Featherstone

Setting a target of wolf reintroduction to Scotland by 2043 allows 35 years (ie more than the 25 years usually considered as a 'generation') to educate and inform a new generation of people about the true nature of the wolf and its importance as an apex predator in ecosystems. This time frame will be more than adequate to counter entrenched negative attitudes about the wolf, and replace them with a better informed perspective which can build a solid base of widespread support for the species' return to Scotland.

Wolf populations have existed continuously in other European countries such as Italy, Spain and Romania, and the people there are used to living in the presence of wolves, and have adapted methods of sheep husbandry for example to minimise losses due to predation. There is no reason why Scottish farmers cannot deploy similar methods to protect their flocks, especially once those become concentrated in the lower-lying more productive areas, as is already beginning to happen due to changes in subsidies to reflect environmental concerns. Again, the proposed date of a wolf reintroduction by 2043 allows plenty of time for sheep farmers to adapt to more wolf-compatible methods of husbandry.

The new generation of young people growing up today are much more environmentally knowledgeable and aware than most of their forebears. As they move into careers and decision-making roles in the next two decades, the balance of opinion will swing further towards more ecologically-sound management of the land in the Highlands, and this will help to prepare the way for wolf reintroduction being acceptable here in Scotland. With coordinated and thoughtful planning now, we can assist, guide and accelerate that process, so that a target date of 2043 for the return of wolves will become eminently feasible.

Steve Carver

I've been in "wolf country" and seen them in the wild and know what that feels like, just to know they're there and that maybe you're not the top of the food chain. It makes you feel alive and more acutely aware of your surroundings.

"Wilderness without wildlife and wildlife without freedom of wilderness are virtually unthinkable, their interdependency is so formally established in our minds" (Hendee et al., 1990). The wolf is symbolic of all that is wild in so many ways, and the Scottish landscape is somehow incomplete without it.

The EU Habitats Directive obliges us to reintroduce once native species where desirable... other European countries have reintroduction programmes for wolf and so it would be a great shame and embarrassment if we can't follow suit. Once re-established, Scotland will be proud of its wolves and they will generate tourism revenue far beyond their cost.

Jeremy Usher Smith

Where? Wolves are the epitome of wilderness. There is no "wild land" in Scotland, as all the land is owned and managed in the Highlands and most of this land is divided into estates. Each estate encloses a wedge or strip of land, encompassing a range of habitats; coming down from a mountain or hill; down across moor land, into commercial forestry or woodland; then down through farm land, to water, either at a loch or river. Some estates border the sea and will either end at the shoreline or be covering the whole or part of an island. This mosaic is an estate, not a wilderness.

Whose land is it? These estates are for the most part privately owned and managed for hunting or "sport". The high tops are the deer forests (from the Norman French, "foret" or hunting ground) for red deer stalking; the moor land is managed for red grouse and the forest and farmland for roe stalking and pheasant shooting. The rivers and lochs are for fishing for trout and salmon. Although the hunting seasons prescribe and limit the time that hunting is allowed, much of the work and employment it creates is undertaken on the estate, during the year is to provide adequate quarry for the hunting period. Stalkers, ghillies, shepherds, cleaners and cooks are all directly employed by the laird. Many lairds have mediaeval "feu" rights, which pre-cede the Magna Carta.

How is the land valued? Not just by the bricks and mortar of the lodge, buildings and cottages, but by the estate's game productivity, over the previous twenty years. The value of an estate is not measured in its generated annual income, which might accrue from an annual expenditure of around a 1/4 a million pounds: a brace of grouse on an Angus hill might bring in £4K, a stalked stag £1.5K. A well managed estate may well be able to run at a small profit, over the annual expenditure of its running costs. However, it would not cover the cost of the capital outlay for its purchase. It is valued by the average of the accumulated annual game tally, over a 20 years period. An example of capital value in 2008: would be a Highland estate of 38,000 acres (1500 hectares), with a lodge, 5 cottages and a hill farm, with an average of 83 stags annually, along with a range of rough shooting and a good trout river, which would come in at around £8 to £9 million. If the annual game productivity was to fall because of the introduction of a large carnivore, then the land value would crash, under the present way that it is valued. The estate owners would not allow this

to happen. Another additional form of estate valuation must evolve, either as a payment for holding wolves or actually incorporating the wolf, as a bounty quarry, adding to the value of the estate. This will take time to get all people to accept.

Peter Taylor

If we hold to the dream that the wolf is 'here' already, in the hearts of the people (well many of them) as much as in the fearful minds of farmers and others, then by 'holding the dream' we enable it to manifest.

To 'sell' the idea of wolf returning we need to develop and understanding of what 'wolf' really means - the positive and realistic qualities that appealed to our ancestors who held it in high regard - and of course, it gave rise to the 'dog', our closest animal ally and 'friend' - thus, we need to build a positive picture of wolf-character and look to what it means for our own character (as a mirror).

Finally, though we talk of restoring 'ecosystems', I think this scientific jargon turns the masses (who will have to pay for restoration) off - and I would like to see us embrace the spiritual task of restoring ourselves - and thus the wolf is as much a part of a healthy 'US' as it is of a healthy ecosystem!.