

Preface

MORE BOOKS MAY have been written about wolves than about any other wildlife species. A quick survey of our bookshelves yields a count of forty-one. So why another one? Because none of the others presents the comprehensive, up-to-date, and documented treatment that we strove for in this one. None of them combines the 350 person-years of research experience with, and knowledge of, wolves that our authors bring to the project. We have attempted here to synthesize as much of the scientific and scholarly literature on the wolf as we could.

And the time for this project is right. Not only has the study of wolf biology blossomed during the last few decades, but wolf populations themselves have proliferated, expanding their ranges into areas that have not heard their howls for over half a century. Thus new generations of humans are viewing the wolf in new contexts, and with fresh perspectives.

Science, too, has now scrutinized the wolf in a revolutionary way. The new tools and techniques that became available just after the most recent book that synthesized wolf information was published (Mech 1970) yielded a treasure trove of information undreamed of at that time. Radio-tracking, first applied to wolves in the late 1960s (Kolenosky and Johnston 1967; Mech and Frenzel 1971a), has since unlocked multitudes of puzzles about the wolf's life. In Minnesota alone, about a thousand wolves have been radio-tracked (Mech 1973, 1979a, 1986, 2000c; L. D. Mech, unpublished data; Van Ballenberghe et al. 1975; Fritts and Mech 1981; Berg and Kuehn 1982; Fuller 1989b). In Alaska, over a hundred radio-tagged wolf packs had been studied by 1991 (Stephenson et al. 1995),

and such studies are ongoing. Nine monographs based on radio-tracking of wolves have been published (Mech and Frenzel 1971a; Van Ballenberghe et al. 1975; Fritts and Mech 1981; Peterson, Woolington, and Bailey 1984; Ballard et al. 1987, 1997; Gasaway et al. 1983; Mech et al. 1998; Theberge and Theberge 1999). Radio-tracking produced detailed information about wolf movements and spacing, but also fostered and aided in many other dimensions of wolf research.

Although most of the above work was done in North America, field research also began on wolves in other parts of the world at about the same time and is now flourishing. Pulliainen (1965) in Finland, Zimen and Boitani (1975) in Italy, and Bibikov (1975) in Russia paved the way, and the formation of the World Conservation Union's (IUCN) Wolf Specialist Group in 1975 (Pimlott 1975) fostered international exchange of information about wolves and wolf research techniques. At present, wolf studies have been conducted or are under way in Saudi Arabia, Israel, India, Mongolia, Romania, Croatia, and several other countries. These investigations have added considerably to our knowledge about the wolf.

So both wolf populations and knowledge about wolves have expanded so much in the last 30 years that a new synthesis of information was imperative. When we pondered this problem, we concluded that the only way such a project could get done was as a collaborative effort. As the amount of information about wolves expanded, certain scientists specialized in and became authorities on various aspects of wolf biology. We chose each of them to cover these specialties in separate chap-

ters. A total of twenty-two authors have contributed to this book.

To launch the project, we held a two-day meeting of the chapter authors in Tuscany, Italy, in 1994. There each chapter's senior author presented his or her proposed chapter outline for all of us to critique. Areas of overlap were identified and resolved and missing material was added. Enthusiasm flourished, and we all dispersed and set about to tackle our assignments.

Then reality set in. Even when the total task was divvied up, it proved formidable. Each author had to superimpose his or her contributions on an already full schedule of teaching or research. Instead of taking two years to complete the project, it took seven. Meanwhile, more wolves were radio-tagged, more data came flooding in, and more papers were published.

Of course, there is no end to the data stream, so all we could do is work in the latest findings as they appeared

for as long as the production process allowed. The ongoing studies of the biology of the reintroduced wolf population in Yellowstone National Park are particularly productive and will greatly promote our understanding of the wolf. We have tried to incorporate as many of the new findings from Yellowstone as we could, but certainly more will be forthcoming.

We hope this book will provide a lasting foundation on which to build new studies. We also hope it will promote a much better understanding of the wolf and foster ecologically sound wolf management. Together, research, public understanding, and proper management should help minimize the inevitable conflicts between wolves and humans and better the chances for wolf conservation worldwide. To this end, the authors and editors of this book are donating all of its royalties to the International Wolf Center.