

# Addressing Human-wolf Conflict in Latvia: A Study of Discourses in Online News Media

Agnese Reķe

This research is financed by a grant from the Latvian Council of Science, and is conducted at the FGES UL, project “Competing Discourses of Nature in Latvia and Ecological Solidarity as a Consensus Building Strategy” (lzp-2020/1-0304).

**Keywords:** wolves, large carnivores, conservation, human attitudes, media analysis, perceptions

## Introduction

After a consistent population decline for several centuries, wolves are making a comeback in Europe. According to the statistics of European Commission (European Commission 2019), currently there are around 17,000 wolves in continental Europe, excluding the territory of Russia and Belarus. This is the largest number of wolves Europe has experienced in centuries. The most influential factors causing the population growth are believed to be the effectively introduced species conservation measures and farmland abandonment that has led to more areas being suitable for wolves' existence (Trouwborst 2010; Svenning et al. 2016). Even though the return of wolves might be a victory for nature conservationists, it has caused fierce discussions between stakeholders about the place of wolves in the European landscape: groups welcoming the return of wolves vs. groups stating that wild wolves do not belong in the modern European landscape (Drenthen 2015). There is also a lot of tension between stakeholders regarding hunting restrictions (Andersone, Ozoliņš 2004; Torres et al. 2020) and livestock depredation issues (Linnell, Cretois 2018). The highly emotional attitudes towards the return of wolves might be linked to the long and complex history of human-wolf conflicts in Europe. Due to wolves' predatory behaviour and stigmas linked to the species, they have been subjected to a heavy persecution and extermination since the Middle ages (Pluskowski 2006). In the following centuries human-wolf conflict had escalated even more because of epidemics of rabies, famine, urbanisation and an increased importance of livestock farming, leading to a continent-wide war against European wolves that drove the wolf population near extinction in the late 19th century (Trouwborst 2010; van Maanen 2019). The numbers of wolves slightly increased after both World Wars; however, the population still did not manage to bounce back due to continuing persecution efforts. Not until the 1970s was there an end to the mass extermination of wolves in Europe when they were included in the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats as a strictly protected fauna species (Council of Europe 1979).

The heated discussions about the return of wolves have caused a rapid growth in the number of studies focusing on attitudes towards wolves. Thus far researchers have found that acceptance of wolves and other large carnivores are influenced by many factors such as education, place of residence (urban or rural), personal interests, age and gender (Røskaft et al. 2003; Kleiven et al. 2004; Torres et al. 2020). The attitudes towards wolves vary from positive to negative, and in general wolves are still among the most controversially rated



Figure 1. Image from an article that propagates wolf hunting (Kalniņš 1930).

animals in Europe. Moreover, according to a report by the European Commission (European Commission 2012), the largest threat to wolves in Europe is low public acceptance. Hence it is crucial to assess the human-wolf relationship to find solutions for the co-existence of both species in the 21st century Europe.

In Latvia, the number of wolves has increased significantly during the last century, mainly due to lower hunting intensity and species conservation measures implanted after joining the European Union. Studies show that in Latvia, as in other European countries, attitudes towards wolves vary greatly based on several criteria such as place of residence, gender, and personal interests (Andersone, Ozoliņš 2002; 2004; Balčiauskas 2007). The dislike towards wolves is mostly linked to the perceived threats that wolves might cause to humans, as well as to livestock and game depredation. In the year 2014, during the development of the current species conservation plan, the wolf was nominated as the Animal of the Year (Latvian Museum of Natural History 2019) in order to boost public knowledge on the ecological role of wolves. Research has shown that better knowledge of the species is linked to a higher acceptance rate (Tack et al. 2019). Unfortunately, there is

no scientific evidence on the actual impact the event had on the public attitudes. Despite previously conducted research there are also some other unknowns about the human-wolf relationship in Latvia. For example, all of the aforementioned studies are based on surveys, addressing mainly the societal attitudes towards wolves. Thus far there is no research on the public discourses on wolves that, in fact, play a vital role in building knowledge and opinions of the general public (Anthony, Tarr 2019).

With this study I aim to contribute to the understanding of the human-wolf conflict from the perspective of environmental humanities by analysing the portrayal of wolves in online news media. Even though online news media might not represent the attitudes of all society, it provides a valuable insight into the discussion on wolves in Latvia, the main stakeholders of the discussion, as well as their potential objectives. Moreover, online news is one of the most popular news sources for general society. Drawing on the semi-quantitative content analysis of the articles published in the most popular online news media websites in Latvia, I discuss the dominant discourses that have permeated the public media space since 2003. To gain an insight into the continuity of the discourses thorough the last century, I analysed selected newspaper articles and official data during various periods of Latvia's history. The discourse analysis is structured around the following aspects: (1) how the portrayal of wolves constitutes a particular discourse, (2) what stakeholder groups are behind particular attitudes and discourses, (3) what arguments are used for reasoning the attitudes, and (4) what are the potential objectives of the identified discourses.

## Wolves in Latvia: from subjects of legitimate mass elimination to protected species

The main characteristic that makes the human-wolf relationship different in Latvia from the majority of other European countries, is the more or less continuous presence of wolves. Unlike in most European countries, wolves never completely vanished from the Latvian landscape despite fierce extermination efforts during the 20th century. The main reason for this is likely because of the presence of vast forest areas in Latvia and the neighbouring countries, as well as a relatively low population density (Ozoliņš et al. 2017).

Statistics show that the wolf population has fluctuated greatly in the last century from less than 20 individuals in the 1930s to more than 1000 today (Ozoliņš et al. 2017; Valsts mežu dienests 2019). The population changes are mostly related to hunting intensity that is strongly linked to the political attitudes towards wolves and major historical events, such as the world wars. According to a compilation of historical statistics (Ozoliņš et al. 2017), the first population growth of wolves in the 20th century is linked to World War I. During the time of war, hunting intensity decreased, hence wolf population grew, reaching approx. 500 individuals. However, already in the late 1920s, mass elimination campaigns of wolves were initiated (Figure 1). The number of wolves continued dropping until World War II, reaching only 14 individuals left in the wild in 1935 (ibid.). After World War II, the wolf population

Number of livestock  
attacked by wolves

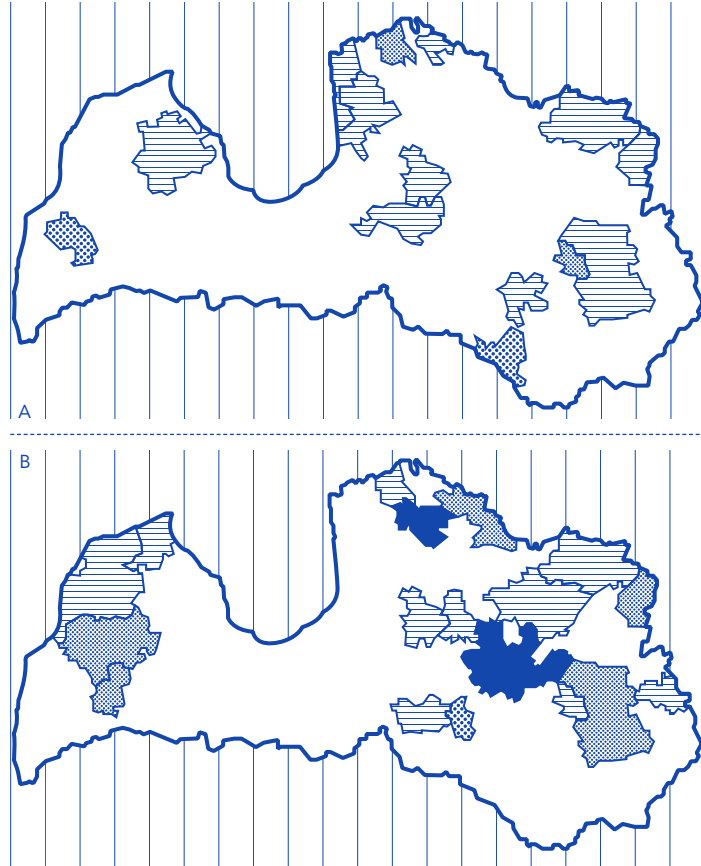
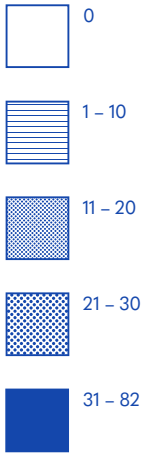


Figure 2. Livestock depredation by wolves per municipality in 2013 (A) and 2019 (B). Data source: State Forest Service of Latvia.

grew back to around 200; however, again only for just a decade. In the mid-1950s intense elimination campaigns of wolves began once again - this time led by the ideology of Soviet Union that interpreted all large carnivores as pests hindering economic growth. At the end of 1960s, there were again only a few wolves left. In the 1970s, the intensity of wolf hunting decreased and the population managed to bounce back to around 200. A more rapid population growth followed in 1990s when, due to changes in the political regime of Latvia, wolf elimination campaigns were suspended. In the mid-1990s the number of wolves increased to around 1000 animals. The population maximum in the mid-1990s marked the beginning of a new wave of wolf elimination that continued through the early 2000s. In year 2000 around 500 wolves were roaming in Latvia's landscape (ibid.).

The hostile attitudes towards wolves are vividly visible in the press materials from the 20th century. For example, an article published in the newspaper “Cīņa” reports on a meeting between hunters and representatives of a local municipality in Madona (Robinzons 1958). At the meeting, hunters state that they have captured one wolf pup, killed one lynx, but no adult wolves. The representatives of the municipality comment that it is not enough for a group of professional hunters, and that they should put more effort into eliminating the predators. Another example comes from a brief article published in 1948 stating that a hunter was rewarded with a cash prize, as well as several kilos of sugar, salt and soap ([Annon.] 1948).

Wolves have been denoted as harmful predators, robbers, a disease to land, a danger to rural inhabitants and predatory beasts by the press throughout the 20th century. Newspapers published articles with such titles as “Let’s destroy the wolves!” and reported on a case when a driver was rewarded with a cash prize of 50 lats after he unintentionally killed a wolf in a car accident ([Annon.] 1996). It should be noted that in 1996 the average monthly wage in Latvia was 100 lats; 50 lats was a quite generous reward. The hostile attitude towards wolves is not unique to only the 20th century, it dates centuries back—evidence for cash prizes for wolf elimination can be found as far back as 1825 (Lamsters 1937), demonstrating that in Latvia, as in other European countries, the “war against wolves” has a long history.

An important turning point in “wolves’ politics” was Latvia’s accession to the European Union (EU). To join the EU, Latvia undertook implementation of several nature conservation measures, including the protection of wolves. As a result, in 2003 the first species protection plan that set wolf hunting limitations and provided guidelines for species management was developed (Ozoliņš et al. 2017), transforming the wolf’s image from a harmful pest to a protected species on the political level.

## Main issues and conflicts in the governance of the current wolf population

Nowadays Latvia hosts a stable and slowly growing population of about 1200 wolves (Valsts mežu dienests 2019) — around 7% of all wolves in Europe. According to the available statistics, it is the highest number of wolves since the beginning of the last century. Moreover, it is believed that wolves in Latvia currently have the widest geographical occurrence range in the last fifty years (Ozoliņš et al. 2017).

The population growth in combination with hunting quotas introduced after joining the EU have caused tension between government representatives, hunters, and farmers. The most topical issue for hunters seems to be the size of hunting quotas. Latvia is one of the few European countries where wolf hunting is still legal due to the assumed favourable population size and health, yet controlled by hunting quotas (Ozoliņš et al. 2017). The hunting quota is set every year to balance the interests of hunting community and species

protection, as well as to keep the population size under control. In 2021 the hunting quota was 280 individuals. Considering the official statistics on the current population size, it is around 23% of the whole population. Nevertheless, according to information in public media, some hunters believe that hunting quotas should be still significantly increased.

For livestock farmers, the most pressing matter is the unresolved livestock depredation compensation issue. Latvia is one of the few European countries where farmers still cannot apply for state's compensation for damages made by wolves (Linnell, Cretois 2018), although the number of livestock affected by wolf attacks is increasing (Figure 2). The number of livestock attacked by wolves (mainly sheep, occasionally also goats, cattle, and dogs) has tripled in the last 5 years (105 incidents in 2013, 305 in 2019) (Valsts mežu dienests 2019), indicating a potential growth of tension between wolves and livestock farmers as well.

## Data and methods

The prevailing discourses on wolves were assessed by conducting a semi-quantitative content analysis of articles published in the eight most popular Latvian news websites (data on media popularity (Gemius 2019)): Delfi ([www.delfi.lv](http://www.delfi.lv)), Apollo ([www.apollo.lv](http://www.apollo.lv)), Tvnet ([www.tvnet.lv](http://www.tvnet.lv)), Kas Jauns ([www.jauns.lv](http://www.jauns.lv)), Latvijas Avīze ([www.la.lv](http://www.la.lv)), Skaties ([www.skaties.lv](http://www.skaties.lv)), Diena ([www.diena.lv](http://www.diena.lv)) and Latvijas Sabiedriskie mediji ([www.lsm.lv](http://www.lsm.lv)). All of the chosen websites cover a wide range of topics from daily news to politics, culture and sports. None of them is specialised in nature conservation topics. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the main target audience of *Latvijas Avīze* is the rural community, and it focuses more on topics related to agriculture and hunting in comparison to other websites.

The media analysis was conducted as follows: In the analysis, I included all articles published from 2003 to 2019 (115 articles in total) that were available in the archives of the news websites and that contained keywords “wolf” or “wolves” (in Latvian—“vilks” or “vilki”) either in the title or text. The year 2003 was chosen as a reference point because it was the year when first wolf conservation measures were introduced in Latvia, limiting species hunting (Ozoliņš et al. 2017). After collecting all articles, each article was analysed separately by assessing the following aspects: year of publication, publishing media, main topic (or topics) of the article (hunting/attacks to livestock/other human-wolf conflicts/species conservation/popular science content/other), occupation of the commentators cited in article as stated by article's author (e.g. hunter, livestock farmer, zoologist, a representative of a municipality), a short summary of article, quotations that state attitudes towards wolves, and other potentially relevant information. Additionally, content analysis of the articles' titles was conducted to gain an overview of main topics covered by media and to analyse language used to describe wolves. Based on the collected information, dominant discourses on wolves in the news websites were identified.



Figure 3. Illustration from article that informs that hunting quota of 2011 is almost met (Photo: Delfi, [Anon.] 2011),

## Wolf as a threat

This discourse is based on the assumption that wolves cause a threat both to humans and forest ecosystems, and that their numbers should be strictly limited by hunters. Arguments used for strengthening the discourse are often highly emotional, based on subjective interpretations of the perceived threats caused by wolves that often contradict scientific knowledge on behaviour and ecology of wolves. It is mostly generated by hunters and, occasionally, also livestock farmers, mainly to campaign against the current species protection measures and the lack of compensations for livestock depredation.

Journalists tend to participate in the creation of this discourse as well (intentionally or unintentionally), for example, by choosing article titles such as “Wolves from Russia swarming Viļaka Municipality, local inhabitants are endangered”, even though the article only states that several attacks to dogs and wild animals were registered in the municipality, providing no proof that humans might be endangered.

The journalists’ interpretation of wolf as a threat is visible in the adjectives chosen to describe wolves too, for example, bloodthirsty wolf, cruel wolf, vulturous animals. The portrayal of wolf as a dangerous and aggressive animal is also present in the images chosen for visualising articles, sometimes even in articles that are not related to conflicts or aggressive wolf behaviour (Figure 3).

The discourse of wolf as a threat consists of three main parts, each of them focusing on a different aspect of the perceived threats: wolf as a threat to human safety, wolf as an economic threat, and wolf as a threat to forest ecosystem.



*Wolf as a threat to human safety*

Although studies show that nowadays wolves do not cause serious threat to humans (Linnell et al. 2002), in Latvia's media the perception of wolf as a threat to humans is very common, especially in articles focusing on predator control issues and hunting. Speculations about possible attacks are used mainly by hunters for advocating the need for larger hunting quotas. For example, a comment by the Chairman of Latvian Hunters' Union quoted in an article in *Latvijas avīze*:

If wolf hunting would be prohibited as the environmentalists want, the population of wolves would increase rapidly already in a couple of years, and wolves would stop fearing humans. [...] Soon after that we would see the first attacks on humans. (Šterna 2016)

Even though his comment is not backed up by scientific evidence, it clearly paints a dramatic picture for readers who do not possess knowledge on wolves' behaviour and ecology. Using the fear of wolves is a solid basis for propagating more intense wolf hunting as it is deeply rooted in the public memory or "the circulation of recollections among members of a given community" (Houdek, Kendall 2019: 2). In Europe, there are indeed some registered lethal wolf attacks on humans; however, the majority of them date back to at least the 18th century. There are also some more recent records of wolves, especially rabid wolves, attacking humans in Europe in the 21st century; however, such incidents are highly rare (Linnell et al. 2002). Today, many more Europeans are injured in ungulate-vehicle collisions (Langbein et al. 2011) than by attacks of large carnivores. Nevertheless, humans still fear wolves more than ungulates. This might be linked both to the predatory behaviour of wolves, as well as to the mentioned public memory. As stated by Houdek and Kendall (2019), the recollections in the public memory are often inaccurate and they tend to differ from official historical facts because they entail the specifics of human memory— which aspects are remembered, which aspects are forgotten, and how particular events are contextualised. In the course of time, some of the registered wolf attacks to humans might have mutated into rural myths, far from real facts and timeline of the events. Moreover, some of the historical incidents might have been replicated in the popular culture, increasing their influence even more. It is found that wolves are among the most common "villains" in the Western popular culture (for example, in fairy tales, stories for children, animation movies), resulting in the cultural stigmatization of wolves (Lynn 2010; Drenthen 2015). By actively using the public memory and stigmatization of wolves, the creators of this discourse (intentionally or unintentionally) perpetuate the perception of wolf as a threat to humans.

*Wolf as an economic threat*

This part of the discourse is focused on species predatory behaviour and threats that they might cause to farmers' property (livestock). It is mostly present in articles on the wolf attack compensation issues and hunting quotas. The main generators of this perception are hunters and farmers. Farmers mostly argue that due to the growing economic threats caused by wolves, the compensation issue should be assessed, as currently Latvia does not offer any

financial compensations for livestock depredation. Hunters, in turn, use the discourse of wolf as an economic threat to argue the need for larger hunting quotas, insisting that the best way for decreasing livestock depredation is more intense hunting.

Economic threats caused by wolves are indeed a topical issue in many European countries, including Latvia. However, it should be noted that in most cases the economic losses caused by wolf attacks to livestock are linked to the lack of anti-predatory measures such as proper electric fencing or guard dogs. To deal with the livestock depredation issues, a common practise is state's financial compensations for livestock depredation (*ex post facto* compensations) and financial support for improving anti-predatory measures (Linnell, Cretois 2018). Some European countries like Sweden have chosen an alternative path and introduced preventive payment system or *ex ante* system that compensates farmers for the risk caused by large carnivores (*ibid.*).

A study by Nauhton-Treves et al. (2003) suggests that in the context of tolerance towards wolves, *ex post facto* compensations for livestock depredation do not make a significant difference. Funding for anti-predatory measures is believed to be a more effective solution (Linnell, Cretois 2018). For the *ex ante* compensations, the results are contradictory—in Sweden, the *ex ante* compensation system has helped to achieve nature conservation targets (Persson et al. 2015); however, in Norway, Finland, and Portugal potential implementation of *ex ante* payments instead of *ex post facto* compensations was strongly opposed by farmers (Linnell, Cretois 2018).

Still, in Latvia there is no national compensation system at all. The only available financial support for livestock farmers is funding for installing anti-predatory measures such as electric fencing. However, many farmers choose not to use the available funding, arguing that it takes too much personal financial and time investment and that the number of wolves should be limited instead.

### *Wolf as a threat to forest ecosystem*

The third aspect that shapes the broader discourse of wolf as a threat is related to forest ecosystem. This perception is generated exclusively by hunters. It is based on a scientifically unjustified assumption that wolves kill too many wild animals, hence disturbing the forest ecosystem.

A quote that illustrates this perception comes from an article titled “I am not as cruel as a wolf” that tells a story about a hunter who has devoted his 50 year hunting career to wolves:

I was fascinated by the wisdom and adaption abilities of this animal. Nevertheless, I also believe wolves cause a lot of damage to forest ecosystems, thus they should be hunted and their presence in a forest—strongly controlled. ([Anon.] 2014)

The comment shows that on the one hand, the hunter has some respect towards the intellectual abilities of wolves, but on the other hand, he believes that wolves are harmful

species to forest ecosystems. In turn, scientific knowledge states that wolves are among the key species ensuring proper functioning of ecosystems. According to scientific evidence, wolves perform many ecologically vital functions such as disease control by eliminating sick and weak animals (Ripple et al. 2014) and modification of ungulates' grazing patterns that benefit many other flora and fauna species (Kuijper et al. 2013). These functions of wolves are ignored by the generators of the discourse.

## Wolf as a protected species

This discourse is generated by governmental experts working with the species management (mostly representatives from Latvian State Forest Research Institute “Silava” and the State Forest Service of Latvia). It portrays wolves as controversial animals that are, however, vital for the biodiversity, and, therefore, need to be legally protected. The discourse is mostly present in articles covering farmer-wolf or hunter-wolf conflicts (in the comments of governmental representatives) and press releases from governmental institutions. The discourse is mostly used to advocate the need to support current species' conservation policy, despite the inconveniences wolves might cause to humans. Articles focusing on this perception also tend to differ in terms of images chosen for illustrating the articles—they mostly portray wolves as charismatic and majestic animals roaming in the wilderness (Figure 4).

This perception also seems to be used as an attempt to reconcile the tension between stakeholders (especially hunters vs. governmental representatives) as it repeatedly states that the existence of wolves in the modern-day Europe will always be a result of compromises—all stakeholders cannot meet all their objectives, yet it is possible to discuss the best compromise for everyone.

The discourse is based on the conventional nature conservation values in Europe, and it considers both advantages and disadvantages of sharing a landscape with wolves without emotional involvement. Such measures for population regulation as lethal control by hunting and elimination of problematic individuals (rabid wolves, aggressive wolves etc.) are evaluated in a pragmatic and emotionless way: “We base hunting quotas on the evidence about the population's fertility, gender, and age structure. One might say, system is based on data similar to the human population demographics” (comment of J. Ozoliņš, one of the leading experts in wolf population management in Latvia (Ambote 2017)). Even though such perception raises some ethical concerns, in comparison to the previously discussed discourse of wolf as a threat, it fits the current EU nature conservation's vision about Europe as a place where wilderness, culture, and progress co-exist (European Commission n.d.).



Figure 4. Illustration from article that informing that wolf has been nominated as “The animal of the year in Latvia” (Photo: Kas Jauns, [Anon.] 2014)

## Discussion

The two prevailing and conflicting discourses in media—*wolf as a threat* and *wolf as a protected species*—differ greatly. The former is rooted in the already historically hostile attitudes towards wolves that were characteristic to Latvia throughout the previous centuries, and it is mostly used to communicate hunters’ desire for larger hunting quotas as wolves are both competitors for game and a highly-valued hunting trophy. The latter is linked to the conventional nature conservation ideas in Europe and objectives of current nature conservation policy.

Media analysis indicates that hunters’ opposition to the current species protection might be strongly linked to their distrust to the government officials responsible for the management of wolves. In Latvia, hunting quotas are responsibility of the State Forest Service (SFS). Each year, SFS defines hunting quotas by evaluating population growth trends and population health. According to information published in the media, a part of the hunting community tends to believe that the official statistics on wolves do not reflect the real number of animals, and that the current policy has been developed by persons “who have no idea what is going on in the forests” (Gaross 2005) However, it should be noted that the hunters’ attitude reflected by media does not represent the opinion of all Latvian hunters, rather just a part that is more active in communication with media. According to their belief, the wolf population in Latvia is much larger than stated by officials, therefore hunting quotas should be increased significantly. In turn, species management specialists argue that the official statistics might in fact even exaggerate the number of wolves in Latvia due to methods used for population evaluation (Ozoliņš et al. 2017).

This brings to attention the issue of stakeholder involvement in nature management. Research shows that the public demands a greater voice in nature management issues (Lord, Cheng 2006), and it is believed that a proper involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process can increase the effectiveness of nature conservation measures (Grodzinska-Jurczak, Cent 2011). However, nature conservation measures, especially the lethal control of species, still should be based on proper scientific evidence, not on opinions of stakeholders, generating a complex challenge of balancing interests of stakeholders and scientific evidence for responsible experts. If this issue is properly assessed in the future, it might decrease the tension between stakeholders and potentially also lessen the hostility towards wolves.

Another interesting aspect revealed by the study, is the absence of discourse generated by environmental or animal rights activists or so called “wolf lovers” (Drenthen 2015) and rewilding discourse in the context of wolves. Typically, the discourse generated by “wolf lovers” is based on the assumption that wolves are charismatic animals that have become victims of “hostile human culture” (ibid.). It tends to idealize wolves and demonize hunters or any measures for population control. In turn, the rewilding discourse contextualizes the growing number of wolves as part of Europe’s rewilding. Rewilding is a novel concept of nature conservation that combines ecological restoration with an emphasis on the renewal of ecological processes with less human involvement, and the return of wild large carnivores to the European landscape has an important place in the concept (Perreira, Navarro 2015; Svenning et al. 2016).

Both discourses are present in the media of other European countries (e.g., Vaughan 2014; Dickinson 2019); however, the conducted media analysis shows no sign of these discourses in the analysed websites of Latvia. This might be linked to the previously mentioned continuous presence of wolves—the excitement that the return of the species caused to part of society in some countries (such as in the Netherlands, see Drenthen 2015), might not be relatable to the inhabitants of Latvia. As for the rewilding discourse, the absence of it in the context of wolves might be related to Latvia’s nature conservation system that is still based mostly on conventional nature conservation ideas, and the controversial and highly emotional reactions towards the implementation of rewilding concepts. Since the early 2000s rewilding ideas have been lobbied by the World Wildlife Fund of Latvia when the first grazing site of semi-wild large herbivores was created in the Pape nature park (Schwartz 2005; Reķe et al. 2019). In the following years some more rewilding ideas were implemented, including the creation of several more grazing sites of semi-wild large herbivores (Reķe et al. 2019) and a controlled burning in the forests of Gauja National Park (Dabas aizsardzības pārvalde 2014). The ideas of rewilding in Latvia were controversially received (Schwartz 2005, 2006; Zariņa et al. this issue), and currently the implementation of rewilding ideas, as well as public discussions on the topic seem to be on hold.

## Conclusion

Two major discourses were revealed in this study: *wolf as a threat* and *wolf as a protected species*. The former is actualized by hunters and farmers, the latter by government experts working in the field of large carnivore management. The discourse generated by governmental representatives (wolf as a protected species) is based on the values of conventional nature protection in Europe. In this discourse, wolves are perceived as subjects of management and human-wolf co-existence — as an art of compromises. The discourse used by hunters and farmers is characterised by hostility towards wolves. It might be rooted in the historical attitudes towards wolves (centuries-long interpretation of the wolf as a harmful species), as well as personal interests of the stakeholder groups, such as trophy hunting or the desire to reduce competition on game. The main issues causing the hostility are game and livestock depredation by wolves, as well as tension between stakeholders (livestock farmers vs. governmental representatives regarding livestock depredation and lack of compensations; hunters vs. governmental representatives regarding the size of wolf hunting quotas). Some arguments used in the discourse of wolf as a threat are highly emotional and scientifically unjustified (for example, the statement that wolves cause a threat to forest ecosystems). They also exploit stigmas about species behaviour, portraying them as aggressive and highly dangerous to humans. In general, there is more online media coverage on negative stories about wolves. This tendency might have an impact on the public attitudes towards wolves, but more research should be done to draw any final conclusions on the media influence.

To sum up, this study adds to the belief that although the return of wolves might enhance Europe's biodiversity, it also illuminates many issues about society's abilities to co-exist with large carnivores and increases tension between certain stakeholder groups. It also raises some unanswered questions about human-wolf relationship in Latvia to be addressed in future studies. For example, whether and how the dominant public discourses in news media influence attitudes in a broader society, and what are the best ways how to deal with the tension between stakeholder groups. Given the current population growth trends and the current EU species protection measures, we need to be aware that the presence of wolves might increase even more in the future. Answering such questions and developing species management policy that considers the scientific knowledge, might be among the greatest challenges for the nature conservationists in the 21st century.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for his/her valuable suggestions and comments on an earlier version of this paper.

- Amboite, Sintija (2017). Atjaunojot lielo plēšēju aizsardzības plānu, medību ierobežojumus negrasās mainīt. *Latvijas Sabiedriskie Mediji*, 24.02 Available: t.ly/8vtf [Accessed 15.05.2020.].
- Andersone, Žanete, Ozoliņš, Jānis (2004). Public Perception of Large Carnivores in Latvia. *Ursus*, No. 15(2), pp. 181–187.
- Andersone, Žanete, Ozoliņš, Jānis (2002). *Sabiedrības viedoklis par trīs lielo plēšēju sugām - lāci Ursus Arctos, vilku Canis Lupus un lūsi Lynx Lynx*. Available: t.ly/1OkB [Accessed 12.05.2020.].
- [Anon.] (2014). Par gada dzīvnieku kļuvis pelēkais vilks. *Jauns*, 23.01. Available: <https://cutt.ly/ol6MAbZ> [Accessed 10.04.2020.].
- [Anon.] (1996). Par nobraukto vilku saņemta 50 latu prēmija. *Lauku Avīze*, 24.12. Available: t.ly/d2Kl [Accessed 01.04.2020.].
- [Anon.] (1948). Prēmijas vilku iznīcinātājiem. *Latgales Zemnieks*, 30.12. Available: <https://bit.ly/3iGahRK> [Accessed 01.04.2020.].
- [Anon.] (2011). Šosezon no medijams vairs tikai viens vilks. *Delfi*, 06.03. Available: t.ly/pjKH [Accessed 01.04.2020.].
- [Anon.] (2014). Vilku mednieks Ikaunieks: Neesmu tik nežēlīgs kā vilks. *Latvijas Sabiedriskie Mediji*, 15.07. Available: t.ly/NDZI [Accessed 14.05.2020.].
- Anthony, Brandon P., Tarr, Katalin (2019). The Wolves Are Back! Local Attitudes towards the Recently Re-Populated Grey Wolf and Wolf Management in Bükk National Park, Hungary. *Acta Zoologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, No. 65(2), pp. 195–214.
- Balčiauskas, Linas (2007). Human-Wolf Coexistence in the Baltic. *Coexistence of Large Carnivores and Humans: Threat or Benefit?* (May), pp. 67–72.
- Council of Europe (1979). *Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats*. Available: t.ly/Zz9F [Accessed 01.12.2020.].
- Dabas aizsardzības pārvalde (2014). *Par plānotajiem zemsedzes dedzināšanas pasākumiem Gaujas nacionālajā parkā*. Available: t.ly/iqDM [Accessed 07.01.2021.].
- Dickinson, Greg (2019). The fierce battle to rewild the Scottish Highlands, wolves and all. *Telegraph*, 22.03. Available: t.ly/HIxZ [Accessed 07.01.2021.].
- Drenthen, Martin (2015). The Return of the Wild in the Anthropocene. Wolf Resurgence in the Netherlands. *Ethics, Policy and Environment* 18 (3), pp. 318–337.
- European Commission (2012). *Status, management and distribution of large carnivores in Europe*. Available: t.ly/j0GU [Accessed 22.04.2020.].
- European Commission (2019). *Status of Large Carnivore Populations in Europe 2012-2016*. Available: t.ly/Tf5v [Accessed 22.04.2020.].
- European Commission (n.d.). *Wilderness in Europe*. Available: t.ly/ADtl [Accessed 01.12.2020.].
- Gaross, Vitauts (2005). Cik vilku ir Latvijas mežos? *Tvnet*, 18.05. Available: t.ly/XMmo [Accessed 04.05.2020.].
- Gemius (2019). *Top 10 apmeklētāk- ie ziņu portāli Latvijā*. Available: t.ly/087w [Accessed 05.01.2020.].
- Houdek, Matthew, Kendall, Phillips (2019). *Public Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kalniņš, A. (1930). Latvijas medību saimniecības stāvoklis. *Mednieks un Makšķernieks*, 01.08. Available: t.ly/HBTw [Accessed 14.04.2020.].
- Kleiven, Jo, Bjerke, Tore, Kaltenborn, Bjorn P. (2004). Factors Influencing the Social Acceptability of Large Carnivore Behaviours. *Biodiversity and Conservation*, No. 13(9), pp. 1647–1658.
- Kuijper, Dries P.J., de Kleine, Christa, Churski, Marcin, van Hooft, Pim, Bubnicki, Jakub, Jędrzejewska, Bogumila (2013). Landscape of Fear in Europe: Wolves Affect Spatial Patterns of Ungulate Browsing in Białowieża Primeval Forest, Poland. *Ecography*, No. 36(12), pp. 1263–1275.
- Lamsters, V. (1937). Mūsu medību fauna. *Mednieks un Makšķernieks*, 01.11. Available: t.ly/sBY4 [Accessed 14.04.2020.].
- Langbein, Jochen, Putman, Rory, Pokorny, Bostjan (2011). Traffic Collisions Involving Deer and Other Ungulates in Europe and Available Measures for Mitigation. *Ungulate Management in Europe*, pp. 215–259.
- Latvian Museum of Natural History (2019). Animal of the year. Available: t.ly/HoDz [Accessed 10.04.2021].
- Linnell, John D.C., Andersen, Reidar, Andersone, Žanete, Balčiauskas, Linas, Blanco, Juan, Boitani, Luigi, Brainerd, Scott, Breitenmoser, Urs,

- Kojola, Ilpo, Liberg, Olof (2002). The Fear of Wolves: A Review of Wolf Attacks on Humans. *Norwegian Institute for Nature Research Oppdragsmelding*, Vol. 731, pp. 1–65.
- Linnell, John D.C., Cretois, Benjamin (2018). *Research for AGRI Committee -The Revival of Wolves and Other Large Predators and Its Impact on Farmers and Their Livelihood in Rural Regions of Europe*. Available: t.ly/CIJy [Accessed 10.12.2020.].
- Lord, Jennifer K., Cheng, Anthony S. (2006). Public Involvement in State Fish and Wildlife Agencies in the U.S.: A Thumbnail Sketch of Techniques and Barriers. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife*, No. 11(1), pp. 55–69.
- Lynn, William S. (2010). Discourse and Wolves: Science, Society, and Ethics. *Society and Animals*, No. 18(1), pp. 75–92.
- Nauhton-Treves, Lisa, Grossber, Rebecca, and Treves, Adrian (2003). Paying for Tolerance: Rural Citizens' Attitudes toward Wolf Depredation and Compensation. *Conservation Biology*, No. 17(6), pp. 1500–1511.
- Ozoliņš, Jānis, Žunna, Agrita, Ornicāns, Aivars, Done, Gundega, Stepanova, Alda, Pilāte, Digna, Šuba, Jurgis, Lūkins, Mārtiņš, Howlett, Samantha J., Bagrade, Guna (2017). *Pelekā vilka Canis Lupus sugas aizsardzības plāns*. Available: t.ly/dmFk [Accessed 03.04.2020.].
- Perreira, Henrique M., Navarro, Laetitia M. (eds.) (2015). *Rewilding European Landscapes*. London: Springer Open.
- Persson, Jens, Rauset, Geir R., Chapron, Guillaume (2015). Paying for an Endangered Predator Leads to Population Recovery. *Conservation Letters*, No. 8(5), pp. 345–350.
- Pluskowski, Aleksander (2006). *Wolves and the Wilderness in the Middle Ages*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press.
- Reķe, Agnese, Zariņa, Anita, Rūsiņa, Solvita (2019). Landscape of semi-wild large herbivores in the specially protected nature territories of Latvia. *Folia Geographica*, No. 17, pp. 60–68.
- Ripple, William J., Estes, James A., Beschta, Robert L., Wilmers, Christopher C., Ritchie, Euan G., Hebblewhite, Mark, Berger, Joel, Elmhagen, Bodil, Letnic, Mike, Nelson, Michael P., Schmitz, Oswald J., Smith, Douglas W., Wallach, Arian D., Wirsing, Aaron J. (2014). Status and Ecological Effects of the World's Largest Carnivores. *Science*, No. 343(6167). Available: <https://bit.ly/3AAV93> [Accessed 03.04.2020.].
- Robinzons, K. (1958). Vilks nešauj, bet prēmijas saņem. *Cīņa*, 12.02. Available: t.ly/wdhd [Accessed 10.04.2020.].
- Røskaft, Eivind, Bjerke, Tore, Kaltenborn, Bjorn, Linnell, John D., and Andersen, Reidar (2003). Patterns of Self-Reported Fear towards Large Carnivores among the Norwegian Public. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, No. 24(3), pp. 184–198.
- Schwartz, Katrina Z. S. (2006). *Nature and National Identity after Communism. Globalizing the Ethnoscape*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Schwartz, Katrina Z. S. (2005). Wild horses in a 'European wilderness': imagining sustainable development in the post-Communist countryside. *Cultural Geographies*, No. 12(3), pp. 292–320.
- Svenning, Jens C., Pedersen, Pil B.M., Donlan, Josh C., Ejrnæs, Rasmus, Faurby, Soren, Galetti, Mauro, Hansen, Dennis M., Sandel, Brody, Sandom, Christopher J., Terborgh, John W., and Vera, Frans W.M. (2016). Science for a Wilder Anthropocene: Synthesis and Future Directions for Trophic Rewilding Research. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, No. 113(4), pp. 898–906.
- Šterna, Kate (2016). Kas notiktu, ja aizliegtu medības. *Latvijas Avīze*, 03.11. Available: t.ly/RUfċ [Accessed 15.05.2020.].
- Tack, Jurgen, Mulier, Anne-Sophie, van Hecke, Bram, Jary, Joseph (2019). *Assessment of current knowledge on wolves in Europe with a view to their effective conservation and management*. Available: t.ly/Oa0b [Accessed 10.04.2021].
- Torres, Rita T., Lopes, Diana, Fonseca, Carlos, Rosalino, Luis M. (2020). One Rule Does Not Fit It All: Patterns and Drivers of Stakeholders' Perspectives of the Endangered Iberian Wolf. *Journal for Nature Conservation*, No. 55(125822). Available: <https://bit.ly/3ADRpIS> [Accessed 03.04.2021].
- Trouwborst, Arie (2010). Managing the Carnivore Comeback: International and EU Species Protection Law and the Return of Lynx, Wolf and Bear to Western Europe. *Journal of Environmental Law*, No. 22(3), pp. 347–372.



Valsts mežu dienests (2019). *Valsts mežu dienesta statistika par dzīvnieku skaita dinamiku un lielo plēsēju uzbrukumiem*. Available: [t.ly/HRCH](https://t.ly/HRCH) [Accessed 05.01.2020.].

van Maanen, Erwin (2019). Return of the Wolf in Northwestern Europe—A Case of Spontaneous Rewilding. *ECOS*, No. 40(6). Available: [t.ly/vzJL](https://t.ly/vzJL) [Accessed 11.12.2020.]

Vaughan, Adam (2014). Rewilding Britain: bringing wolves, bears and beavers back to the land. *The Guardian*, 19.09. Available: [t.ly/FviL](https://t.ly/FviL) [Accessed 06.01.2021.].

# Cilvēku–vilku konflikts Latvijā: vilku diskursīvais portrets digitālajos ziņu medijos

Agnese Reķe

**Atslēgvārdi:** vilki, lielie plēsēji, dabas aizsardzība, cilvēku–vilku mijattiecības, diskursu analīze

Vilki Eiropā tikuši vajāti un intensīvi iznīcināti gadsimtiem ilgi. Nesaudzīgās izmēģināšanas dēļ lielākajā daļā Eiropas tie izmiruši jau 19. gadsimta beigās. Tomēr pēdējo desmitgažu laikā, pateicoties dabas aizsardzības iniciatīvām un pārmaiņām zemes lietojuma veidos, vilku skaits Eiropā ir ievērojami pieaudzis. Šobrīd kontinentālajā Eiropā (neskaitot Krieviju un Baltkrieviju) mitinās aptuveni 17 000 vilku. Tas ir lielākais skaits vairāku gadsimtu laikā. Arī Latvijā šobrīd ir lielākā vilku populācija kopš 20. gadsimta sākuma (aptuveni 1200 indivīdi). Vilku atgriešanās Eiropā ir liela uzvara dabas aizsardzības nozarei, taču tai pašā laikā process ir saasinājis cilvēku–vilku attiecības un raisījis diskusijas par to vietu mūsdienu Eiropā. Viedokļi par vilku aizsardzību dalās gan iesaistīto pušu, gan plašākas sabiedrības vidū. Daļa uzskata, ka vilki ir būtiska, saudzējama dabas sastāvdaļa, ar kuru mums, cilvēkiem, jāiemācās līdzāspastāvēt, savukārt daļa – ka vilkiem ir vieta tikai dabas rezervātos, kur tie nevar radīt kaitējumu cilvēku interesēm. Pretrunīgās attieksmes dēļ vilku aizsardzības īstenošana Latvijā un citviet Eiropā ir sarežģīta. Lai nodrošinātu veiksmīgu vilku pastāvēšanas nākotni, zināšanas par attieksmi pret vilkiem ir vitāli svarīgas.

Šī pētījuma mērķis ir analizēt cilvēku–vilku attiecības Latvijā no vides humanitāro zinātņu perspektīvas, apskatot dominējošos diskursus par vilkiem populārākajos Latvijas digitālajos ziņu medijos. Pētījumi ir pierādījuši, ka ziņu medijiem ir būtiska loma, veidojot sabiedrības viedokli par dabas aizsardzību. Šī iemesla dēļ tajos atrodamie diskursi var ietekmēt plašākas sabiedrības attieksmi. Analizējot 2003.–2019. gadā publicētos rakstus, secināts, ka medijos dominē divi diskursi: (1) vilks kā drauds un (2) vilks kā aizsargājama suga. Pirmā diskursa galvenie veidotāji ir mednieki (reizēm arī lauksaimnieki), kuri vēlas panākt atļautā medību apjoma palielināšanu, pamatojot savu vēlmi ar riskiem, ko rada vilki. Otrā diskursa veidotāji ir dabas aizsardzības nozares pārstāvji, kas strādā ar sugas apsaimniekošanu saistītās iestādēs un argumentē nepieciešamību sugu sargāt, pamatojoties uz to ekoloģisko lomu.