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ENDANGERED SPECIES

Technical Bulletin Reprint

Wildland Management Center
School of Natural Resources
The University of Michigan

Plan to Give Wolves New Home May be a Howling Success

by Robert E. Taylor

EAST LAKE, N.C.—Is the wolf at the door?

No, says Warren Parker. What's more, it won't be, even if he is allowed to release six red wolves into the swampy thickets of North Carolina's Outer Banks next spring.

Mr. Parker is a biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For several years, he has been searching for a new home for the endangered species, and he thinks he has found it here. Now, the main problem is convincing local residents that—contrary to popular belief—the wolf can be a good neighbor.

"What we've got to overcome," he says, "is that preconceived notion that these animals will blow the door down and eat little Red Riding Hood."

Sheepish Approach

Public opinion isn't to be taken lightly. Two years ago, the government proposed releasing the wolves into a rural area along the Kentucky-Tennessee border. But the plan was howled down. Small farmers and hunters feared livestock losses and hunting restrictions. Environmentalists complained about plans to trap coyotes so they wouldn't interfere with the project. Public hearings turned hostile: One woman said she recalled tales of wolves carrying off children and a man warned that they would dig up graves.

It was devastating," Mr. Parker recalls. "We got a real education out there." And the wolves remained homeless.

The irony is that to hear the experts tell it, the wolf is largely the victim of bad press. David Mech, a Minnesota-based researcher for the Fish and Wildlife Service, says that with the exception of a few cases of rabies, there isn't a single documented case of a wolf attacking human beings in North America. The animals are too frightened of people, he says.

Not a Gray Area

Moreover, the red wolf is a different species from the gray wolf, which in northern climates have even been known to down moose. Red wolves are only about half the size of gray wolves, stay well clear of people, generally eat small mammals and don't even hunt in packs. Once common in the Southeast, they no longer are seen outside of zoos.

Not that red wolves are just sheep in wolves' clothing. Mr. Parker does concede that "they'll occasionally take a deer." But, standing on the stage of the East Lake Community Center, speaking to a group of flannel-shirted locals gathered around a wood stove, he insists that people around here will probably never see more of them than their tracks.

This piece of the Carolinas was chosen for the project as much for the people as for the terrain. Most residents of the peninsula's four tiny communities live off commercial fishing and don't keep livestock. They are hunters and trappers, used to the notion of bobcats and black bears nearby, and most aren't very worried about wolves.

"Turn 'em loose," says Louis Basnight, a local resident. "As long as I can dog-hunt I dont care if they turn a rhinoceros loose." Another man suggested releasing the animals near his mother-in-law's house.

Please turn to the next page

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Red Wolf: A victim of bad press?

Howling Success continued

But some are still concerned, fearing the wolves could eventually kill the dear or quickly overpopulate the area. "I don't see any good in it," grumbles Don Perry, a heavy-set man in a quilted jacket and baseball cap.

To assuage local fears and help manage the wolves, the government plans to outfit them with space-age dog collars. The collars emit radio signals that would enable satellite telemetry to identify each animal's precise location instantaneously. The collar could also hold a microcomputer to store information about the animal's health or habits. And it could hold a remote-controlled tranquilizer dart for emergencies and an explosive bolt to remove the collar when the experiment ends.

"It would work well on kids, too," suggested Mr. Parker.

The gear is costly, but this project is a high priority for the Fish and Wildlife Service. The government says that never before in North America—and perhaps never before in the world—has a predator extinct in its natural habitat been reintroduced to the wild. Success here might accelerate government plans to release Rocky Mountain wolves in Yellowstone National Park, Mexican wolves in New Mexico, panthers in Florida and more. If, on the other hand, the red wolf project fails, funds for such programs might dry up.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Only 65 red wolves remain in zoos and at Mount Ranier, WA breeding facility.

Canis rufus, the only purely American species of wolf, once ranged from the Delaware Bay to the eastern Gulf of Mexico. Today, only about 65 red wolves remain in zoos and at a Mount Rainier, Wash., breeding facility. Time continually raises the risk that new generations will lose the ability to hunt; Mr. Parker recalls visiting the breeding facility and having wolves trot up and lick his hand.

The last wild ones disappeared about a decade ago as development ravaged their last refuge in thick cane brakes of southeast Louisiana and east Texas. But in a 1978 experiment, two of them flourished in the wild on Bulls Island, S.C. for 11 months without even being seen by hunters and birdwatchers. Mr. Parker says the creatures can "hide behind a blade of grass." When the time came to end the experiment, officials had to use a dart gun fired from a helicopter to help recapture the two wolves.

The Bulls Island experience makes experts think the Alligator River Natural Wildlife Refuge here will be a great place for the shy creatures to hide. Its 118,000 swampy acres teem with rabbits, opossums, raccoons and other small game. The area is so nearly impassable that the preferred deer-hunting technique is to loose a pack of dogs on one dirt road and string out hunters on another where deer might be flushed out.

The refuge shares a peninsula with a 46,000-acre Air Force bombing range and only 20,000 acres of private land, mostly farms. The government hopes that the half-dozen wolves it releases will multiply to 25 or more before any stray afield.

So far, unlike the Tennessee and Kentucky residents who cried wolf, local officials and environmental groups here seem to support the project. So, if all goes well, Mr. Parker plans to install his wolves in the woods here next fall in 50-foot-square pens. They will be held in the pens for about six months and fed local game to acclimate them before being set free.

Roaming on the wildlife refuge, they would be protected by law. But provisions of the Endangered Species Act would be waived when they wandered off the refuge, and they could be shot if they threatened people's safety or property.

Mr. Parker calls that concession crucial to gaining local approval for any such project. Ultimately, he says, the wolves "are going to have to make it on their own."

This article appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* on April 1, 1986.

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From the IUCN

World's Rarest Tree Threatened

by Drake McHugh

A rescue plan involving British Airways, the Mauritian Government, Kew Gardens and the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) has been delayed until the patient is well enough to travel.

The plan calls for the rescue of *Ramosmania heterophylla,* commonly called "Cafe marron" from the Indian Ocean island of Rodriguez. There is only one of these trees left in the world and scientists have delayed the latest attempt to fly-out cuttings of the trees because it has suffered wind burn and insect infestations that have left it in a weakened condition. The tree is currently one metre high and has been fenced-off because there is a danger it might be cut for firewood or cuttings taken by well-meaning individuals attempting transplants.

Ramosmania is a genus in the coffee family but is monotypic, which means it includes only one species. It has no close relatives and is endemic only on the Mauritian island of Rodriguez. The last "Cafe marron" is said to have a variety of uses, the most important being a reputed cure for hangovers and venereal disease.

The tree had not been seen since 1940 and was discovered only after a local school teacher urged his students to look for rare plants. In 1980, one of the students found the rarest tree in the world. IUCN scientists have been struggling to keep it alive ever since. Animals browsed on it until the fence arrived and last December a telegram arrived at the World Conservation Centre in Switzerland, saying the tree was under attack by "indeterminable arachnids." The rarest tree in the world had mealy bug.

Botanists warned against chemical sprays because the tree is part of the coffee family and extremely sensitive. An IUCN and WWF scientist, at the site on Rodriguez Island, finally decided on the action that probably saved the tree's life. She went to a local store, and to the merriment of almost everyone, bought dishwashing soap in order to bathe the tree. The treatment worked, (almost always does against mealy-bug attacks say the botanists) but the tree is still not strong enough to take cuttings to be transported to Kew Gardens.

Island authorities have proposed grafting a twig onto a related plant, but it now appears the rescue operations to Kew has the best chance for success. Questions about the future of the lone tree have been asked at the ministerial level. It was hoped that money could be found to post a guard at the tree, but so far that has proved too expensive a proposition.

IUCN Plants Officer Ole Hamann says the next month will probably tell the story. "We believe flowering season is from March through July and if it flowers that may mean it is strong enough to attempt a rescue."

The logistics are already in place to fly the "Cafe marron" cuttings from Rodriguez Island to the main island of Mauritius, on to Africa and immediately to Britain for intensive care at Kew Gardens. If the rescue is successful, it is hoped money can be found to return the tree in numbers to its original home on the island where it survived for thousands of years before loss of habitat reduced its numbers to the one very sick individual the botanists are now trying to save. Dr. Hamann says IUCN members have taken a particular interest in this tree, not because it is the only species threatened but because, "it would be impossible to be a human being and have the chance to save this tree and not to act."

Meanwhile, all eyes are on Rodriguez Island where sometime in the next few weeks, the last "Cafe Marron" in existence will die — or a group of organisations and individuals will swing into action in an attempt to give it a new lease on life for the next thousand years.

Founded in 1948, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) is the largest alliance of nations, official government agencies, scientific bodies and citizens' organisations pledged to conserve nature and natural resources and to work toward sustainable development worldwide.

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Resources

New Publications

Vertebrate Animals of Alabama in Need of Special Attention, edited by Robert H. Mount, is a new publication focusing on the non-game vertebrate species in Alabama that "warrant special attention because they are poorly known declining, or believed to face survival problems in the state . . .In each of the species or subspecies accounts, a description is provided along with a photograph and other information pertinent to the animal's status in Alabama. Range maps are included where appropriate and specific conservation measures are recommended."

The publication is available for $12.00 (plus 6% sales tax for Alabama residents) from "Department of Research Information, Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, Auburn University, Alabama 36849.

The second edition of *Latin American Wildlife Trade Laws,* by Kathryn Fuller and Byron Swift, is a country-by-country analysis of the laws that govern wildlife trade in Central and South America, providing current information about domestic wildlife restrictions throughout the region. The 392-page report, presented in both Spanish and English, is available for $22.50 from TRAFFIC (U.S.A.), 1255 23rd Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037.

The California Agricultural Lands Project has published two books on biotechnology: *Quickbook: Genetic Engineering of Plants* ($9.50) and *Brief-Book: Biotechnology and Genetic Diversity* ($12.50). They are available from: California Agricultural Lands Project, 227 Clayton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117.

Conservation Biology: The Science of Scarcity and Diversity edited by Michael Soule will be released in May by Sinauer Associates, Inc., Sunderland, Massachusetts in paper ($27.00) and cloth ($46.50). This book is the latest and most comprehensive overview of the scientific foundations of conservation biology. It provides essential information in its twenty-five chapters on systematics, disease dynamics, restoration ecology, density, rarity, extinction, and minimum viable population sizes. Its comprehensive bibliography and the suggested readings appended to each chapter make this book accessible to both the student and the professional.

Manchester University Press, England has published *Change In the Amazon Basin,* a two volume set, edited by John Hemming. The first volume deals with the physical aspects of deforestation and analyses of different types of Amazonian ecosystem. The second volume is about the people who are settling in Amazonia, including a number of case studies of colonization projects in various Amazon basin countries. Much of the most recent and most important research on Amazonia is contained in these two books which will be of interest to geographers, ecologists, environmentalists, anthropologists, and anyone studying tropical development.

National Forum on BioDiversity

The rapid destruction of the Earth's natural habitats and the subsequent loss of plants and animals is becoming an increasingly serious problem. The National Forum on BioDiversity, sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences and the Smithsonian Institution, September 21-24, 1986, will provide the public with the learned views of distinguished scientists and scholars of this subject. The Forum is designed to address the subject in a systematic, integrated sequence of activities: **background sessions** in the relevant basic science; **keynote speeches** to present overviews and to identify issues, **panel sessions** for exploring different perspectives and a **round table discussion** to review the contributions of the panelists and the audience. Concurrent with the Forum will be poster-panel exhibitions, film showings, displays of literature and audio-visual materials. A national teleconference via satellite and cable is being planned. Admission is free, however, advanced registration is recommended. A preliminary program can be obtained from the Directorate of International Activities (SI 302), Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560. A final program will be mailed in a subsequent issue of this newsletter.

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