

Chapter X

SOME IMPORTANT PREDATORS

Wolf and Coyote

Quite prolific, and possessing few animal enemies, the wolf, *Canis lupus lycaon*, was extremely common in all parts of New England at time of discovery. It was of "divers coloures some sandy coloured, some griselled, some black (Morton 1637).

Except in the very early days, when black wolves were especially valued by the savages, the pelts have been of little commercial value. Morton (1637) wrote than an Indian would gladly exchange 40 beaver skins for the pelt of one black wolf, and Wood (1634) stated that a black wolf was valued by the Indians at five or six pounds sterling.

Even in southern New England, where they were at less disadvantage from the deep snows, the numbers of deer may have been limited less by food scarcity than by predation of wolves. "These pray upon the Deare very much (Morton 1637) "It is not to be thought into what multitudes they would encrease, were it not for the common devourer, the Wolfe" (Wood 1634). Moose, although better able to defend themselves, were "likewise much devoured." Hare, rabbit and other smaller species were also eaten.

The wolves ranged widely and shifted their range according to the availability of prey species. Perusal of almost any single local history might convey the impression that they were constantly present, since periods when wolves were absent are not usually emphasized. Collectively, New Hampshire histories show that they occurred periodically, both as a result of their wanderings, and marked fluctuations in numbers, to which they were apparently subject. Records are too sketchy to prove that they were definitely cyclic, but there is a strong suggestion that they were

"Wolves came in swarms. They were not plenty at all times. They seemed to roam over a vast extent of country, remaining in any one place only a short time. The moose and deer killed, and all the small animals devoured, the hungry demons were off to pastures new and to other forests teeming with life. Wolves, in great numbers, came howling from the north in 1744, 1764 and 1784. Occasionally a few would be found in the intermediate years' (Little 1888).

With the coming of civilization, quantities of game, which had been available to the wolves, were consumed by the settlers. This loss was

partially compensated by domestic stock, to which wolves were a constant threat. The colonists feared for their own lives as well, although there is almost no evidence that humans were ever molested.

In the White Mountain region, one Indian was said to have been killed and devoured by a starving pack, after killing seven of their number before he was overpowered (Whitton 1834). The fact that the carcasses of the seven wolves were reputedly found intact beside the bones of the Indian, casts doubt on the authenticity of this tale. Wolves have no objection to eating each other, and it is scarcely credible that the remaining wolves would have retired from the field after picking the Indian's bones, leaving the dead wolves untouched.

Either the story has lost nothing in the telling, or it had no basis in fact. The latter conclusion is probably nearer the truth. Whereas similar dramatic incidents are recounted in the history of every township within miles of their occurrence, and considerable poetic license in shifting back and forth across town and county boundaries was assumed, this writer has located only the single reference to the above incident.

Domestic animals were precious, and their loss was a serious setback. The threat of danger to stock, and personal fear, were the incentives for "relentless war upon the wolves of the wilderness." They were hunted and trapped in all manner of ways. Great hunts were sometimes organized by 100 or more men, who surrounded an area, driving the wolves before them toward the center. Occasionally as many as 500 or 600 men assembled for these drives, which were often effective in cleaning up a whole township (Hoover unpub.). Nevertheless, as late as the Revolution, Belknap (1812) considered wolves "very common and very noxious."

From the first, most towns paid local bounties. Records of the depredations of wolves, and the bounties paid, come from all 10 counties, and those mentioned below cover but a fraction of the voluminous references to wolves in New Hampshire.

Rockingham County Wolf packs, which hung around the outskirts, were one of the greatest sources of annoyance to the settlers of Salem. They were most troublesome in winter when it was hard for them to get food. In 1662, the town voted a bounty of 10 shillings to any Indian who should kill a wolf (Gilbert 1907).

In 1751, Salem was paying a bounty of 10 pounds Old Tenor for every grown wolf's head, and 3 pounds for each whelp. It was considered unsafe to travel unarmed after dark (Hurd 1882) although the danger was perhaps exaggerated.

Under a town regulation set up in 1716, Newfields paid bounty on 138 wolves from 1735 to 1737 (Fitts 1912).

Strafford County Wild animals ventured into the most thickly settled parts of the village of Rochester, pilfering crops and sheep. A bounty of 10 shillings for both grown bear and wolves was offered in 1751. A year or so afterward, this was collected on five wolves. They continued to be common long after this time (McDuffee 1892)

Belknap County: At the time Barnstead was settled, bears and wolves were troublesome to the flocks and plantations of John Pitman, It was "Voted to give 3 pounds bounty on a hade of a gray wolf, and 1 pound 10 shillings on a hade for a whelp caught within the bounds of town" (Jewett 1872)

Sanbornton paid \$10.00 for adults, and \$5.00 for whelps. Encouraged by the bounties the inhabitants succeeded in extirpating them before many years. The last wolf was shot in 1790, after having just killed 10 sheep (Runnells 1882).

Gilmanton voted a bounty on wolves in 1788 (Lancaster 1845)

Hillsboro County John Cummings and Joseph Symonds, coming to settle in the town of Hancock, were compelled to swing fire brands during most of their first night there to keep wolves away from the fresh meat they had in camp (Hayward 1889)

Smith (1876) wrote that in the early days of Peterboro, the manufacture of flax preceded that of woolens because it was impractical to keep sheep. Capt. Thomas Morrison lost 50 to wolves in a single night.

Wolves were thick around Antrim for about a half-century after settlement. Most of their damage was to sheep, although rarely and usually without success, they attacked cattle. This town "as well as the whole State, was greatly troubled with wolves (in the winter of 1783-'84) They came in about the settlement in vast numbers from the forests to the west and north, starving and ravenous, destroying sheep and even cattle. A bounty was paid by the State but the urgency of the case was so great that the towns took it up, and Antrim 'Voted five Dollars of a Dittion to the Court Act For Killing of Woolves to be paid by this Town. It was more than a year before the excitement died away, after which gradually these pests disappeared. The loss from wolves was substantial during the following winter of 1784-'85, which was also unusually long and cold, with excessively deep snow (Cochrane 1880).

Whitton (1852) confirms conditions in Antrim in the winter of 1784-'85. Deep snows lasted into April, and wolves were particularly destructive of sheep, and even cattle were endangered.

Merrimack County In 1784, Loudon paid a bounty of 10 pounds for every wolf killed in town (Hurd 1885).

At Andover, in 1790, three gray wolves came into the barnyard of Joseph Fellows and killed three sheep. Hunters tracked a pack of wolves

from Webster Lake toward Kearsarge Mountain, and thence to the town of Hill, in 1805 (Eastman 1910)

Wolves were abundant in Boscawen around the time of settlement. They were not completely eradicated for nearly a century, the last being killed near Cook's Hill in Webster (then a part of Boscawen) in 1831 or '32 (Coffin 1878).

Wolf's Meadow in Hopkinton was named because of the frequency of the appearance of wolves in that area (Lord 1890).

Cheshire County "Long after the wolves and the bears had been driven from the territory north, south, east and west, they found a comparatively safe retreat on the almost inaccessible sides and in the deep ravines of Monadnock, and here they maintained themselves with great boldness and vigor. As wolves rarely attack men, except when nearly starved, they were chiefly dreaded because of the depredations made by them upon the calves and sheep." (Norton 1888).

The last wolf was seen in Gilsum in the winter of 1847-48 (Hayward 1881)

Sullivan County There are few references to wolves in the histories of this county. One was killed in Washington in the winter of 1847-'48, but this wolf (the same mentioned in the preceding paragraph) was chased across the line from Cheshire County. Surrounded as it was by areas where wolves were plentiful, there is no reason to doubt that wolves were present in Sullivan County. It is much more likely that most historians simply failed to mention them.

Carroll County. Conway, in 1777, voted to pay a bounty of 1 pound 10 shillings for adult wolves, four shillings for whelps. In 1816, the town was paying \$20.00 a head. Tamworth was also afflicted with wolves at this period, and paid a like sum (Merrill 1889).

Grafton County: At Haverhill, a local bounty of 6 shillings a head was paid in 1772 (Child 1886-1). It was necessary to pen sheep at night and wolves frequently approached within 20 rods of the houses (Powers 1840).

While most of the able-bodied men of Plymouth were away fighting the Revolution, the women and children were often frightened at night by the howling of wolves. In the neighboring town of Warren, wolves prowled about the houses, sometimes at night standing with their paws on the window sills to peer inside. It is noted that Dick French of Benton was a famous wolf hunter. Further north, in Lyman, Nathaniel Partridge was treed by a pack of wolves, and forced to spend the night in a tree (Child 1888)

Rowell Colby, settling in Enfield in 1779, encountered wolves on his journey to the township.

Coos County Wolves continued here after they had disappeared in other parts of the state.

At Randolph they were reported to have scratched at the doors of the pioneer's cabins (Cross 1924), and Peter Gamsby, an early settler of Stratford, lost 20 sheep in one night (Thompson 1925).

On the east side of the Mountains, Ethan Allen Crawford found wolves most annoying in the early 1800's, in spite of his being a competent hunter. One December night four descended on his flock of sheep, which took refuge among the cattle. A dog which Crawford sent to drive away the marauders was nearly torn to pieces. Crawford finally sold the sheep rather than lose them to the wolves.

He once domesticated two young wolves which he had picked up as pups. They became quite tame and never harmed any of his family or visitors, although they persisted in chasing pigs, sheep and calves, and pulling the tail feathers out of fowl (Crawford 1883).

It has already been related how, after deer became plentiful between 1830 and 1840, wolves returned to Coos County and raised havoc with both deer and domestic stock.

The last wolf in Lancaster was trapped in 1840. Before this date they were frequently heard in the woods about a half-mile east of the village. They remained common in the northern townships until some years later, but were rare before 1880 (Merrill 1888).

State bounties were in force almost continuously from the establishment of the Province 'till near the opening of the present century, long after wolves had ceased to be an important economic liability (For complete list of state bounty laws see Table XXIX.) Records of bounty payments are not available for the years before 1850, and only after 1882 were these expenditures broken down according to species. Payments on wolves from the latter date to 1895, when the law was repealed, are shown in Table XXI.

Wolf bounties were always extremely high — often as much as \$20.00, even in Colonial times. "We know, indeed, that it must have been a pressing necessity that prompted the offering of liberal bounties for the extermination of these beasts" (Bassett 1884).

TABLE XXI
Wolves Bountied, 1882-1895

<i>Year</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>No.</i>
1882	2	1886	0	1890	0	1894	0
1883	0	1887	0	1891	0	1895	2
1884	0	1888	3	1892	0		
1885	1	1889	0	1893	12		

Even at such exorbitant rates, the one, to perhaps five bounties a year ordinarily collected in any one town, were small compensation

for the effort expended in killing wolves. Sometimes the proceeds of a hunt meant no more than a barrel of rum to refresh the hundred or more men who had participated.

The concentrated program of eradication must have played a major part in eliminating wolves, which except for human interference would have insured their future by increased inroads into domestic flocks and herds. Nevertheless, without the added incentive of bounties, they would have been dispatched as fast as was humanly possible.

Another factor which must have been equally important to their extirpation, if only through bringing them into the vicinity of human habitations where they were more easily killed, was reduction of game populations on which they preyed. Deer, and many other species, reached their lowest levels around 1880, and it is interesting to note that this is the date given by most authorities for the disappearance of wolves in New Hampshire, although a few evidently persisted after this date.

As late as 1930 one wolf skin was listed on the trappers report (N. H. Fish & Game Dept. 1932), but there is no information as to its origin, and it may not have been correctly identified. The last definite record, then, is the two reported taken in 1895, the year the bounty was repealed.

The coyote was not originally present in this state, and a single specimen is known to have been taken here. This was shot in Holderness on October 24, 1944, by a fox hunter, and was identified by Hilbert R. Siegler, Chief of the Management and Research Division of the Fish and Game Department, and Stanley P. Young of the Fish and Wildlife Service. A year later one was reported observed near Berlin on the York Pond Road.