
From local newspaper notes to DNA profiles – The science and politics of wolf population estimates in Norway from the 1960s until today

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Abstract

The first population estimates of wolves in Norway were made by wildlife biologists in the 1960s, by browsing through local newspapers in search of notes about people who had observed wolves. Besides from a bounty paid for killed individuals, wolves were not managed by state authorities in Norway at the time. When the wolves got protected by law in 1971, they were simultaneously made formal objects of management for the Norwegian directorate of nature management. As a consequence of this and a rise in both wolf numbers and political controversy during the following decades, great efforts have been made at developing more accurate methods for population estimates. Today, the wolves in Norway are among the most intensively monitored in the world, and wildlife biologists and geneticists employed by the directorate have established DNA profiles, territories, kinship relations, and inbreeding coefficients for almost all wolves in Norway. This paper will trace the efforts of wildlife biologists to record and monitor wolves in Norway from the 1960s until today. It will examine the development of increasingly accurate and extensive methods, by employing research reports and archival material from the directorate as sources. Further, the paper will investigate how the wolves in Norway have come to be so closely monitored, and explore the relations between the intensified production of knowledge and the increasingly detailed regulation of the wolves.

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