

Wolves make comeback in America with friendlier attitude from humans

By Oliver Milman, The Guardian, 06.02.16



America once had half a million wolves. Native Americans thought they were magic animals and left them alone.

Then the Europeans arrived. They hated the wolf. The animal frightened them and killed their cattle.

The new settlers to North America killed as many wolves as they could.

The American gray wolf came close to dying out. At one point, only one small pack remained.

During the 1960s, wolves began to return slowly. The government made it against the law to hunt them.

Bringing Wolves Back

Twenty years ago, Yellowstone National Park decided to bring wolves back onto its land. No wolves had lived there for 60 years.

Today, the park has 100 wolves in 10 packs.

The wolves' return has been very good for the park. Like other big hunters, wolves perform an important job.

Gray Wolf, Elk Hunter

Years ago, Yellowstone had many wolves. They hunted elk, a large kind of deer.

Then the wolves were killed off. No animal was left to hunt the elk. Soon, there were too many elk.

The elk killed off many of the park's trees. Having too few trees around was bad for beavers and birds. Both began to disappear.

The return of wolves changed everything. Soon, there were no longer too many elk. Trees began growing back. Then, birds and beavers returned.

Doug Smith is in charge of watching over Yellowstone's wolves. He hopes wolves will be able to return to many other places.

Are Wolves Dangerous?

The way Americans feel about wolves can be a problem, he said. "Some people just hate them."

Many people are frightened of wolves, and think they are a big danger. Wolves are frightened of people too, though. They mostly stay away from people and almost never attack them.

Some of the Yellowstone wolves became famous. They made wolves seem less frightening and helped wolves become more popular.

A wolf called No. 9 gave birth to eight pups. They were the park's first litter. No. 9 was soon known as the founding mother of Yellowstone.

Another wolf was known as a good hunter. Many people were sad when she was shot outside the park in 2012.

It Takes Time

"Fifty years ago, everyone hated wolves," Smith said. Now, only around half the people in the country do. People are slowly learning "we can live with them," he said.

It will take time for all Americans to understand that wolves are important. Still, their return is something to be happy about.