

# Lakritz: Stop crying wolf and causing wildlife to suffer



*NAOMI LAKRITZ, CALGARY HERALD*

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Bounties on wolves and coyotes should be dropped in favour of more humane methods of protecting livestock, says Naomi Lakritz. *DAWN VILLELLA / AP*

Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill — and keep on killing.

Welcome to what feels like man's sole response to the presence of wildlife. More than 1,400 Alberta wolves have been killed in the past five years — shot, trapped or poisoned through the bounty hunting program, and more than 25,000 coyotes have met the same fate.

Why? Because man has invaded these animals' territories and set up one of the most carbon-intensive operations — ranching — in their space. Therefore, any creature that interferes with man's primal need to make money (#) by raising and killing domestic animals, will also be killed.

Except that, as the old TV commercial says, it's not nice to fool Mother Nature. If you get rid of 25,000 coyotes, for example, nature rushes in to fill that vacuum. It's like a see-saw — when the number of coyotes goes down, the number of prey goes up. With prey abundant, coyotes have more pups.

Writing in the journal *Animals*, in an article entitled *Predator Bounties in Western Canada Cause Animal Suffering and Compromise Wildlife Conservation Efforts*, authors Gilbert Proulx, a wildlife biologist with Alpha Wildlife Research & Management, and Dwight Rodtka, a retired problem wildlife specialist, argue eloquently for a ban (#) on bounties:

“Bounty hunters use inhumane and non-selective killing methods such as shooting animals in non-vital regions, and killing neck snares and strychnine poisoning, which cause suffering and delayed deaths. They are unselective, and kill many non-target species, some of them at risk. Predator bounty programs have been found to be ineffective by wildlife professionals, and they use killing methods that cause needless suffering and jeopardize wildlife conservation programs ... government agencies should not permit the implementation of bounty programs. Accordingly, they must develop conservation programs that will minimize wildlife-human conflicts, prevent the unnecessary and inhumane killing of animals, and ensure the persistence of all wildlife species.”

Some of the species that suffer collateral damage from man's efforts to exterminate other species that get in his way, include grizzlies, swift foxes and badgers. Wolves fetch between \$75 and \$500 each in Alberta, while coyotes can earn a bounty hunter \$15 each. It depends in which municipality the bounty program is being run, or by which landowner.

Beef producers naturally take the view that if an animal is interfering with their ability to make a profit (#), then that animal should die.

"If there's a problem area, for sure we would be supporting putting bounties on these animals because they do cause problems," Fred Hays, a policy analyst for Alberta Beef Producers, told the Edmonton Journal.

Sure, why not? Some wild animal in agony doesn't count. Out of sight, out of mind. It's so much easier just to kill everything that gets in your way, despite the existence of alternative humane methods for keeping predators away from livestock.

Alberta Agriculture's website recommends the use of guard donkeys: "They bray, bare their teeth, chase, and attempt to kick and bite dogs and coyotes. Some donkeys will also chase deer, bears, strange livestock, humans and other intruders in a similar fashion. Donkeys ... investigate disturbances within the herd or flock and will pursue predators or intruders if they detect them."

Various breeds of dogs can also serve as livestock guards, including Great Pyrenees and Anatolian shepherds. Llamas can do the same work. The National Geographic reported back in 2003 on a study done by William Franklin, an Iowa State University professor emeritus, which found that 50 per cent (#) of farmers and ranchers interviewed "reported 100 per cent reduction in their predator losses after employing (llamas) as a guard."

The magazine Modern Farmer last year featured an Alberta sheep farmer, Louise Liebenberg, who uses eight Sarplaninac dogs — canines from Kosovo that are described as so focused on guarding livestock that they're not affectionate toward their own humans — to

17/11/2015

Lakritz: Stop crying wolf and causing wildlife to suffer | Calgary Herald

successfully guard her sheep.

There's just no need, or excuse, for cruelty. Wolves and coyotes are suffering, and that's just sickening and unnecessary. Come on, Alberta, drop the obsession with killing. There are more humane approaches.

*Naomi Lakritz is a Herald columnist.*