

2024 Marc Bekoff on Wolf Reintroduction.mp3

Shelley Schlender Marc Bekoff, here on The Science Show. How on Earth radio. we just had you on the air talking about your book, The Emotional Lives of Animals. [8.6s]

Marc Bekoff [00:00:36] [00:00:36]Yes. I talked to Beth Bennett about my new book, [2.9s] which I'm really excited about because it's an updated version of a book that was published 17 years ago with about 300 new references.

Shelley Schlender [00:00:49] [00:00:49]And you briefly mentioned wolves there. But today we're going to talk more about wolves, because they're in the news here in Colorado for many different reasons. Do you want to give us an update about the latest about the reintroduction effort for wolves in Colorado. [13.9s]

Marc Bekoff [00:02:39] [00:02:39]Well, yeah. I mean, so the first batch of wolves was brought to Colorado and released in mid to late December. And we really didn't know how they would do. [12.7s] But it turned out that a pack was formed with a mother, a father, and they ultimately had four children, which is really good news. But throughout the spring, there's just been a lot of complaining by ranchers, some of whom are losing some food, animals to the wolves and others who haven't, but they just really like to complain. And so what we learned very recently was that Colorado Parks and Wildlife began an operation they called trapping and relocating the wolves of a pack who happened to have dened on the land of a rancher who has cows and sheep. And they were just doing what wolves do, and that is they do attack and they eat the animals. So this rancher complained along with others. But this rancher had done little to nothing to put into effect non-lethal deterrents, baby fencing, noise lights. I mean, a lot CPW in my eyes.

Shelley Schlender [00:04:04] That's Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

Marc Bekoff [00:04:06] Yes. Right. Yeah. CPW is Colorado Parks and Wildlife. So CPW yielded to the wishes of this rancher and trapped. All six members of this family group. And unfortunately, the father, the male, died after being trapped. And the mother and her four children are now in a cage. Some might call it a sanctuary somewhere in Colorado. And I have really no idea where that is.

Shelley Schlender [00:04:41] When you say it's a cage, you don't mean a wire cage where they can't move. It's more likely a place that has an enclosed fence. You don't know whether it's big or small, but they're someplace away from wild habitat as far as you know.

Marc Bekoff [00:04:56] Right. But. An enclosure is still a cage. I mean, and that's how I have to cash it out. I mean, these walls were wild in Oregon. They were wild in Colorado. And now they're confined. I mean, there's no way any sanctuary can build an enclosure large enough to satisfy the needs of now the mother and her four children.

Shelley Schlender [00:05:19] Okay. Let's go back from this immediate description of what's happening to some other context for this. The plan in Colorado was to fulfill the mandate of the vote of Colorado, and that wolves should be reintroduced. They're a natural species to have in our area. But they were eradicated. And now and then a wolf comes in to Colorado from other states, wild areas of the state. But in the last year, they've been reintroduced. What it started out as ten wolves were captured from Oregon and brought to Colorado and released mainly in an area between Steamboat Springs and Granby and Fort Collins, in a wild area over there. Ten wolves.

Marc Bekoff [00:06:04] Right. I was at the release of the Wolves, the first release. I was really pleased because my expertise is in carnivore behavior, behavioral ecology. And I was here just to watch to see if there were personality differences among the wolves, for example. And there were. But I'm really not allowed to say very much right now.

Shelley Schlender [00:06:25] But there is a boy, girl, boy, girl, boy, girl. There were about five males and five females that were all about a year and a half, two, three years old, roughly, so that they

were young in the prime of life, healthy. ~~And is this do you just~~ with reintroducing wolves, do you just plop them all down at once and then see what happens? How do you do this so that they get a chance in a new place to survive?

Marc Bekoff [00:06:54] I call it the Dump and Prey strategy because in a sense, what we do is what these projects do is they trap animals, say in this case, Oregon. They fly them here and they release them. So at the initial release, there were five of them. There was a male and female from each of two packs and one male, an older male. So these the young animals were maybe about nine months old.

Shelley Schlender [00:07:20] And so all of the wolves that were first released, they didn't know each other when they were released in Colorado. They had not been part of the same pack.

Marc Bekoff [00:07:29] No. In two cases, it was siblings.

Shelley Schlender [00:07:33] It was a brother and a sister. Or a brother and a brother.

Marc Bekoff [00:07:36] Yeah, brother and sister. Yeah, exactly. So, yeah, I mean, that's sometimes very random because when you go out to trap wolves, it's really difficult to do. And, you know, I don't know what happened on the ground in Oregon other than that's how they decided to do it.

Shelley Schlender [00:07:53] And so when a wolf gets reintroduced to Colorado, then you just described how it's kind of just plopped down and then you hope things work out. Is that also how it works? If a wolf is leaving a pack that it's been part of to make its own way in the world? Does it just leave one day and keep walking until or trotting until it can find a place that's its own place?

Marc Bekoff [00:08:17] Yeah, but when that happens, you know, and wolves may leave a group and they become more lone wolves, they're usually in an area. Well, I mean, they're always in an area they know because they've lived there before. ~~So~~ So to compound this is you're basically you're not reintroducing individuals. I like to call it a repatriation process because we're, repeat, repatriating animals who used to live here. But yeah, I mean, you bring them here. It's a totally new habitat. And I can say that at the initial release, there were very marked personality differences. Some of them just bolted out of the cage they were in, others stopped, looked around and were very hesitant and two, there's no other way to cash it out. Then they were reluctant to leave the cage. You don't know why ~~they were there~~. I mean, they were all highly stressed. I mean, the move, the moving process and reintroduction process is highly stressful. But but yes, that's basically it. You're putting them out there and you're hoping they can make it.

Shelley Schlender [00:09:27] We're hoping that they can make it without deciding that the food that they'll eat is cattle and sheep, ideally. Now, you're chuckling at this. You're wincing. If I can describe the look on your face, because what in the wild wolves eat rabbits, They eat. Elk. They eat deer. What do wolves in the wild in the United States eat?

Marc Bekoff [00:09:51] Yeah. They. They prefer large ungulates, deer sometimes, elk, moose, if they can take it. ~~But when you~~ [00:09:59] when you bring wolves to a state like Colorado. And it's not a national park like Yellowstone. It's inevitable. They're going to come across these food, animals, livestock. [14.3s] I hate the word livestock, to be honest with you. I mean. [00:10:17] And yeah. And it's an easy meal. [1.5s]

Shelley Schlender [00:10:19] Now, you're you're actually you're a vegetarian.

Marc Bekoff [00:10:23] I'm a vegan, Actually.

Shelley Schlender [00:10:23] You're a vegan. And your philosophical your philosophical point of view is you don't like the idea of livestock. Period.

Marc Bekoff [00:10:32] Well, I understand wolves are carnivores and they're going to eat other animals. That's fine with me. I mean, that's who they are. But yeah, I mean, one of the problems that you run into and I know it sounds you know, it kind of sounds nasty, but a lot of the ranchers are complaining about killing. But they make money off of killing animals.

Shelley Schlender [00:10:56] The state provides them with a compensation when they can prove that one of their livestock has been killed by a wolf. Now, if their livestock was killed by a local dog or a local dog pack, they wouldn't get compensation. But if they can demonstrate that convincingly that an animal was killed by a wolf, then the compensation can be pretty good.

Marc Bekoff [00:11:19] Yeah, up to \$15,000. But what I meant by they raise animals and they make money off of killing is the animals who survive are sent off to slaughterhouses where they have a horrific life.

Shelley Schlender [00:11:30] You mean that the animals, the livestock are taken to a slaughterhouse. If they, if they don't get killed by wolves. Well, it's rare that a livestock gets killed by wolves. So for an economic standpoint, it's a fairly rare thing for livestock to be killed by a wolf.

Marc Bekoff [00:11:49] Yeah. I mean, you know, like I said, you know, it's just an easy meal to room service. We have selected out of we've selected all the anti predatory behaviors out of food animals like cows and sheep.

Shelley Schlender [00:12:06] All right. So-so [00:12:07] cows and sheep are sitting ducks for being eaten by wolves, [4.1s] if you will. But actually, in the United States, when we have coyote packs, as an example, if it's a stable coyote pack, it's less likely to go after cows or sheep. It's more likely to go after that kind of pack is less likely to be marauding in human areas. They tend to avoid human areas if it's a stable pack of coyotes. Is that also the case with a stable pack of wolves?

Marc Bekoff [00:12:38] Not necessarily. I mean, coyotes are medium sized carnivores and they can survive on rodents, rabbits and other small animals. Wolves need a lot of food just because they're much larger. And you'll have more individuals in a typical pack. And I studied coyotes for years and pack hunting by coyotes is is very rare. But once again, when a group of coyotes they may not even be a coordinated pack comes across a sheep farm. And especially when they're attracted to this sheep farm because carcasses are laid out once again, it's just easy pickings. So, you know, people people [00:13:22] a lot of people don't realize that life in the wild is really hard and that all the time and energy that goes into trying to get a meal doesn't go into other aspects of living like surviving, you know, warding off other animals who try to home in on your territory or steal your food. So it's just the economics of it is take the easiest meal, which means take the meal that costs less in terms of, say, calories expended. [31.2s]

Shelley Schlender [00:13:54] [00:13:54] The sounds problematic right now we have in Colorado just ten wolves that have been reintroduced. How many of those wolves have died so far in the last years? At 2 or 3. [10.3s]

Marc Bekoff [00:14:05] Now it's it's three now.

Shelley Schlender [00:14:07] Okay. So just a week ago, it was two. What happened? How did the third one die?

Marc Bekoff [00:14:14] We're not sure. We're being told that they're going to do a necropsy to find out how the wolf died. So we don't know. I mean, one of the.

Shelley Schlender [00:14:23] So it was found dead. It was found. All in all, ten of these wolves have collars on so they can be tracked. And the collar of this wolf suddenly gave the death bleep.

Marc Bekoff [00:14:33] Yeah, No, exactly. And we we know that one of the wolves who was killed a few months ago was killed by a cougar. And that's when I say it's not uncommon, it's not all that common. But wolves, on average, are not really successful fighting cougars. I mean, cougars are your true natural born killers.

Shelley Schlender [00:14:55] That's an example, though, of how these wolves coming into a new territory are not familiar with where the territorial lines are, where the mountain lions. Actually,

you're going to get miffed if they see a wolf there. So there's there's a lot more likelihood that the predators that are there are going to go after the wolves that are encroaching their territory.

Marc Bekoff [00:15:17] ~~Right. And that's excuse me.~~ That's a really good point, because once this family pack got established, they feel really comfortable where they are. I mean, I'm sure there were elk around, but there was also a ranch there, you know, with sheep and cows. So. Right. So part of the difficulty when you reintroduce animals to a strange area or if they migrate there on their own, is they have to learn the lay of the landscape. And so, you know, they can sniff out cougars. They could sniff out animals who might harm them. You know, bears sometimes will compete with them. But, I mean, the fact is, because I study animal behavior and I also study animal emotions, these animals are really stressed. I mean, on top of everything else, the trip here and being held in cages and then being released, they're highly stressed. So a lot of energy is going into just surviving.

Shelley Schlender [00:16:13] And are they a little bit like a delinquent teenager where if they were with a pack that was established and they knew where the rules were? They might be more likely to avoid places that humans are. They don't really normally seek out places that humans are. But if the pack or that particular wolf is worried and doesn't know quite what to do in this new place, it's more likely to go for the easiest prey and avoid the signals that they're getting into contact with the humans that normally they avoid.

Marc Bekoff [00:16:45] Yeah, I mean, I mean, I've been around wild wolves a lot as well as coyote. They tend to avoid humans. So you're right, when they form a pack and they find a safe home because it is their home, they tend to hang around there. I mean, they'll go off on the forays. They'll go off and ~~do the thing, you know,~~ do things that wolves do. But they determine, if you will, somehow that this is a safe place and there's enough food around to eat. So when they're on their own or when they're just forming a group, they engage in a lot of exploratory behavior to find the best place to be.

Shelley Schlender [00:17:19] That sounds like going on a vacation and exploring. But in the case of these wolves, it's dangerous exploring. They may end up going more after livestock, which gets them in trouble with humans. Or they may go into territory of lions and tigers and bears, which means that those bigger predators may teach them a lesson by killing them.

Marc Bekoff [00:17:39] Right. I mean, there's there's no tigers here. But no, but but no, I really appreciate what you're saying, because internationally, when these projects go away, when you find a new group of carnivores having been being formed, they're exploring, you know, what they're doing. They're looking for the best house, just like we might. Location, location, location. And for the carnivores, it means easy food or the easiest food and the lack of competitors. Right. So so so what's happening now is, you know, we had one wolf pack. It settles down on the ranch of a rancher who did nothing to try to deter them. And then when more wolves come into the state, there's going to be more competition because Colorado is huge. But wolves can cover a huge amount of space.

Shelley Schlender [00:18:29] So it's going to be a little bit of a rocky road to introduce these wolves. You've mentioned a couple of times things ranchers can do to deter the wolves. We're not talking about gunshots for the most part as a way to do it. You're talking about fences. ~~What~~ how do you deter wolves from going after sheep and cattle?

Marc Bekoff [00:18:48] Well, yeah. I mean, the best way to deter them is to clean up what they call kill pits.

Shelley Schlender [00:18:56] So is. So if there's carcasses of cattle, sheep around, that's going to draw a lot more wolves or other predators into that area. What's a kill pit?

Marc Bekoff [00:19:08] A kill pit is where carcasses are dumped, perhaps not even covered.

Shelley Schlender [00:19:14] So does this mean like a cow that has been sick and so it died and so it's just been put someplace to be dealt with later?

Marc Bekoff [00:19:22] Right, Exactly. It could be an animal, you know, individual who died of disease or, you know, usually it's disease or something else. Right. And so it's a magnet. And I mean.

Shelley Schlender [00:19:33] It's a trash dump full of carcasses.

Marc Bekoff [00:19:35] Yeah, exactly. So there's been studies done that show if you clean up the carcasses, you really reduce the likelihood and the number of potential predators who come in. I mean, there's been studies done on coyotes that basically show that, and there's no reason to think it wouldn't apply to wolves.

Shelley Schlender [00:19:52] Are you charging that the landowners near where the wolves in Colorado, where this one pack, this one male wolf, was eating the sheep and the cattle? . Do you think that they had a kill pit on that land?

Marc Bekoff [00:20:07] I've been told there is. And the important point about that is that the rancher applied for a chronic depredation permit and was denied it by c p w.

Shelley Schlender [00:20:18] Let's translate what chronic depredation permit means. Does that mean that you go out to the edge of your ranch and you go, shoo, shoo. Or does that mean that you get a gun and you shoot and kill the the wolf that has been attacking your sheep and cattle?

Marc Bekoff [00:20:34] Right. So there's a number of aspects here. Number one.

Shelley Schlender [00:20:37] We're talking about chronic depredation permit.

Marc Bekoff [00:20:39] Right. So the first important point is that we-a group of people I was part of it, of course, was trying to get a a definition for chronic depredation. What is chronic depredation mean? And it's never been defined.

Shelley Schlender [00:20:55] It sounds like it means a wolf as an example that's in the habit of going after sheep and cattle and it gets in the habit and it would rather go after sheep and cattle than elk and deer and rabbits.

Marc Bekoff [00:21:10] Exactly. But part of the definition is how often has an individual wolf done that? Right. So like I said, the major way to deter or decrease the likelihood that a wolf would be attracted to where your food animals are would be to clean up and bury carcasses. And there were a lot of complaints about this that it was really time consuming and expensive. But I've talked to a couple of people on the West Slope who said it's just easy. You take a backhoe, you dig a hole, and you dump the carcass in and you cover it. And and these are not necessarily people who are pro, Wolf, but, you know, they're saying, look, it isn't as hard as people make it seem. Right. And so so, so. Right. And so what happens, of course, is that these animals once again go for the easy meal. But a wolf sense of smell is amazing, you know, and they're going to smell a dead cow or a dead sheep from a distance.

Shelley Schlender [00:22:13] Miles and miles. Tens of miles.

Marc Bekoff [00:22:16] I don't know if people know, but, you know, downwind it could be a long distance. And they're also they're also going out on exploratory forays. You know, it's like, you know, walking down the mall in Boulder and looking for a restaurant to eat at. I mean, but what they're doing is they're going out once again looking for easy prey. And in the field of behavioral ecology, there's a concept called prudent predation. And really what it means is a prudent predator is one who puts out as little energy as possible to get as much energy back. And if it's a positive balance, they put out X amount of energy and get X squared back. That's good because there's never a guaranteed meal. And I've I've watched Wild Coyotes for years up in Wyoming. And you really get the sense that after they've been in an area for a while, they know the lay of the land. They know, you know, in this case it would be small rodents and where to go. And so they don't want to go into net negative caloric imbalance.

Shelley Schlender [00:23:22] Speaking of negative caloric imbalance, we're talking again about wolves in Colorado. [00:23:28]The goal is to reintroduce enough wolves that they'll be roughly 200 wolves in Colorado distributed throughout the state, probably in packs that are about, maybe ten animals in a stable pack. Alpha mom and alpha dad, Maybe a couple of. Aunts and uncles and then some babies is kind of a stable pack. So groupings like that and hopefully the vision is that these stable packs will get their food from deer and elk and they'll find being around humans so repugnant and so scary that they won't go after those cattle and sheep. That's the dream of something like that, because we do need predators that can keep the elk population from getting too high. There are way too many elk in Colorado right now, don't you think? [48.7s]

Marc Bekoff [00:24:18] Yeah, there's a lot of elk here. I mean, this is like heaven for for for the wolves. But the point you're making is so important because what's going to happen is these packs are going to try to avoid one another, too, you know. And so the amount of space you need I mean, you could do the math, but it's really hard to imagine. So if you had three, you only had one wolf pack Now, only eight months after or almost nine months after being placed into Colorado. And they also they just went out and found an easy place to be. But when you start adding new wolves, I mean, even not even hundreds. But I imagine the situation where, you know, your average wolf pack could be, say, between 6 and 10 individuals in Yellowstone is packed with 37 individuals because there can be there's enough food for them. So just imagine the situation if there were just five packs right now. Or over the next year, they're going to be spacing themselves out all over. This is not a national park. They're going to be avoiding other wolves, other predators, and they're going to try to avoid ranches, especially if they're a deterrence. So in my humble opinion, [00:25:38]I'm really concerned that this the number of Wolf Ranch altercations is going to go up logarithmic-exponentially. [7.7s]

Shelley Schlender [00:25:47] Oh Dear. All right. So. So one thing about Colorado is that we have a lot of wide open space, but there are a lot of ranches sprinkled in that wide open space or places where the cattle or the sheep are. And that's a little different from a national park where you don't have ranchers in it. And are you? How do you space out wolves so that they're not hanging out close to the ranches?

Marc Bekoff [00:26:17] You can't I mean, it's a great question, but they're going to space themselves out. I mean, you.

Shelley Schlender [00:26:23] Could go, but but from what you said, they'll space themselves out from other wolf packs. So they'll do a distribution like that. But those tempting sheep and cattle that are in those ranches, which are a little easier to get than the elk and the deer.

Marc Bekoff [00:26:42] Right. And so as they space themselves out, the probability that a pack or many packs come across a ranch is really higher, you know, than it would be if they weren't there.

Shelley Schlender [00:26:55] [00:26:55]Is this just a bad combination? Should we never have even tried to do this? Or is there more training and rules for ranchers to say, guys, we're going to do this? So how do you do this deterrence. So you scare the wolves and make them know that it's not worth it to go after your livestock? [19.1s]

Marc Bekoff [00:27:15] It's a great question. And, you know, I love wolves. I want wolves here in Colorado. I want live wild wolves who can live, wolf appropriate lives. And that means that they are going to hunt and they are going to take the easy meal. And so it's a really difficult situation for me personally because I want them here. So [00:27:38]the one way you can decrease the conflicts would be to really have ranchers do everything they can to deter the wolves. [8.9s]

Shelley Schlender [00:27:47] [00:27:47]And what are those things? You've mentioned that if there are dead carcasses of cattle, sheep or chickens on a ranch, anything that's an animal that has died, it needs to be buried as soon as possible so that that. Chance to scavenge on already dead meat won't be available on the ranch. That's one thing. Is that the only thing to do? [20.8s]

Marc Bekoff [00:28:09] [00:28:09]No. You can use noise, deterrents, flagging. [2.1s]

Shelley Schlender [00:28:12] [00:28:12]What kind of noises? [0.5s]

Marc Bekoff [00:28:13] [00:28:13] I mean, it could just be loud noises. I mean, people are surprised that sometimes just loud bangs, like shaking cans and, you know, and making really raucous sounds could deter them. And also range riders. [13.3s]

Shelley Schlender [00:28:27] [00:28:27] What's her range rider? [0.7s]

Marc Bekoff [00:28:29] [00:28:29] As far as I know, it would be somebody who's actually riding around probably on a horse and and patrolling. These aren't cheap. Well, how. [9.1s]

Shelley Schlender [00:28:38] [00:28:38] About on ATV? [0.5s]

Marc Bekoff [00:28:41] [00:28:41] Well, it could be, yeah. [0.9s]

Shelley Schlender [00:28:42] [00:28:42] You know, just taken ATVs out, and that's still not easy. But take an ATV or a truck out and drive the perimeter of the place that is the ranch. [9.1s]

Marc Bekoff [00:28:52] Right. So. So I would divide. Yeah, right. A range rider would be somebody riding the range. You could obviously be in an ATV. And what you would hope is that wolves would learn it well enough. They would learn and they would. They definitely would learn where they can go and where they can't go.

Shelley Schlender [00:29:09] Do you have the Range rider just go by what might be a wolf and say shoo, or just the person who's riding on the horse, have rubber bullets or something to really totally scare the wolves. How do they do it?

Marc Bekoff [00:29:25] I'm not sure, to be honest with you. It might be just the mere presence of the Range rider or, you know, another person out there. And wolves are really smart. And they're going they learn in the wild where they can and cannot go because packs tend to avoid one another. They may do it by vocalizations. You know, somebody suggested that you could do what are called playback experiments by playing back a wolf howl.

Shelley Schlender [00:29:54] Maybe a wolf howl would be a deterrent. You know, with coyotes, there's a coyote in my neighborhood here in Boulder that certain times of the night or the morning, it's trotting casually down the street like it's just a buddy. And would wolves do that, too? Or Wolf's more averse to being around people.

Marc Bekoff [00:30:13] Well, I think they're all adverse, But but I you could well imagine a scene in the future where you might have a wolf pack forming, you know, in Up on the Enchanted Mesa. I'm being facetious, but, you know, they might come down into the streets when there aren't people here. You know, the coyotes are just so adaptable. And once again, the reason that the problems are different with wolves and coyotes is because chaos can survive on smaller prey. So they can go after prairie dogs and rabbits and mice and other rodents. Wolves need large ungulates.

Shelley Schlender [00:30:49] You know, most of the elk that I know of are there in Estes Park near the hotels.

Marc Bekoff [00:30:55] Right. And I know that there was a report of a wolf in Estes Park a week or two ago. And, you know, people were saying, it's wonderful. What do I think in all honesty? On the one hand, yeah, it's great there, there. On the other hand, it shows exactly what I'm talking about is they're going to space themselves out. And once again, Estes Park is Rocky Mountain Park is not Yellowstone. And in all honesty.

Shelley Schlender [00:31:22] Rocky Mountain National Park is. What about what what what percentage? Smaller than Yellowstone. It's a very small park, actually.

Marc Bekoff [00:31:31] Right. It is. I don't know what percentage, but it's tiny compared to Yellowstone. And in all honesty, from the get go, I was saying to people who were saying, well, look, the wolves are really successful in Yellowstone and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I was just

saying, well, Yellowstone, Rocky Mount. Sorry. I was just saying that Colorado is not Yellowstone National Park, nor does it have an area like that. And in all honesty, a lot of people blew me off and I said, fine. I mean.

Shelley Schlender [00:32:02] [00:32:02] You said it's going to be a little more challenging to introduce wolves without conflict in Colorado than it's been to have wolves be in Yellowstone National Park. [9.5s]

Marc Bekoff [00:32:12] Exactly. And people didn't want to hear it. And, you know, some people would say to me, well, you don't really want wolves here. And like I said before, I do want wolves here, but I want them to be able to live, wolf. Appropriate lives. There's nothing, Wolf, appropriate about what just happened. I mean, putting the death of the father aside. I mean.

Shelley Schlender [00:32:34] So when you say what just happened, what just happened to give context is that there was a male wolf that was reintroduced who was skinny. So it was not doing a great job feeding itself, but it was attacking sheep and cattle as a way to get food. And somewhere along the line, it was captured along with its den mate and its pups. And when the wolf was captured, the male wolf, it was discovered. Not only was it very thin, it was very undernourished, but it also had a very severe wound on its leg that was ended up being a fatal wound. That's the story that we've heard.

Marc Bekoff [00:33:13] Right. But they're ignoring a couple of facts. Number one, that when you have an infection, even if you're a human and you get highly stressed, it could kill you or really harm you.

Shelley Schlender [00:33:23] So just the infection alone might have been enough to cause it to be severely losing weight. The fact that it had had an infection, we don't know whether the infection was caused by a mountain lion. We know it probably was not hoofs from a sheep or an elk or a cow.

Marc Bekoff [00:33:44] Right, Exactly. And so one, like you said, one thing they're missing is the stress level, which would be really profound. The other thing, the other detail that very few people are reporting on is regardless of the fact that this Wolf was injured and had lost a lot of weight, he had enough energy, if you will, to form a pair bond mate and provide food for his kids.

Shelley Schlender [00:34:09] And it might be that he had only lost weight in the last two weeks after he got the wound.

Marc Bekoff [00:34:14] It's possible they say that. I think someone said there was evidence he was losing weight. And once again, that would be another reason why he goes cow, sheep, elk, deer. I mean, it's a no brainer.

Shelley Schlender [00:34:28] So go after the one that's easy to catch.

Marc Bekoff [00:34:31] It's go take away room service. No, exactly. So there's there's a lot of parts of the puzzle that are missing.

Shelley Schlender [00:34:40] Okay. So here we've got this dilemma. We do want wolves in Colorado. It would be good for the environment, likely because it could mean that the high let's pretend that the wolves only go after the wildlife that we want them to go after. It's a lot easier to have a wolf go and chase elk around so that they don't stay in one place and overgrazed an area than it is to send in ATVs to dry to try to do that. Or horses and people on horses. Wolves just they just do it and they know how to do it. And they kill the weakest of the elk. It's good for the elk in that way.

Marc Bekoff [00:35:15] Yeah, I mean, there's a lot of benefits, but it's going to it's going to take a lot of give and take, if you will, peaceful coexistence. Well, I would like that. The people go, that's just so Boulder. But it's not so boulder at all.

Shelley Schlender [00:35:30] [00:35:30]If if people in Colorado want wolves to be here, do there need to be more compensation to train ranchers on the effective ways to limit and discourage wolves from being around their livestock? [14.9s]

Marc Bekoff [00:35:46] Yeah, I mean, [00:35:46]c p w has done a really good job of putting out educational material. I mean, to me, what it comes down to and it sounds really horrible to say, but there's some people who just don't want wolves here. They hate wolves. They're afraid of wolves, whatever it is. And they're not going to change. And then put on the other side of the coin, there are people who want wolves here and are willing to accept the fact that wolves are carnivores. So I don't know. I mean, I honestly don't know how we can reach a balance. The compensation program is very generous. And so I just really think it's come down to sort of a very black and white discussion and that the shades of gray are really different. It's really difficult to obtain. And so I am skeptical. I mean, let me put it another way. With 40 or 50 wolves on the ground. [60.3s]

Shelley Schlender [00:36:48] The goal is that many. Right now we only have we started out with ten being reintroduced. Now it's down to seven, right? Plus one little litter of pups that might or might not go back into the wild. So seven wolves are now, I take it back six because one of the wolves was the the mom of the pups that are now needing to be. Nobody knows what's going to happen with them. So six of the ten wolves are still in the wild in Colorado. In one year, we've lost four of them being out there. That's 40%.

Marc Bekoff [00:37:24] Exactly. And the other fact in one year was nine months, actually. But but really, what's so important here, too, is that the likelihood of two of these introduced wolves mating and producing, you know, a family of four in the first year is was really low. So, you know, I always say this this has to be celebrated and. I just for the life of me cannot understand why c p w elected to go decimate the first breeding group. The DNA for future wolves, by the way. And once you put them in captivity, I mean, [00:38:09]I know the dad has died. I mean, what are they going to do? Just rerelease them? These pups haven't learned how to hunt or kill their giving. You know, wherever they are, they're likely giving them roadkill. And this this phenomenon called food imprinting, where an animal eats food and then you hope that they'll be imprinted on it. And so when they go to, say, in the case of these animals, when they're released, they'll be looking for roadkill or dead carcasses. Well, they might, but but it's easy food. So there's no evidence that food imprinting works. One day I did a whole lot of research on it. There's no evidence that it's going to work. When they get released, their wolf DNA. And they're Wolf, you know, if you will. This ancestry is going to still say get the easiest meal possible. [52.4s]

Shelley Schlender [00:39:04] [00:39:04]Which would you rather do? Have the wolves here and get rid of the ranches or let the ranches be here and accept that wolves are going to be hard to have back in Colorado. [8.9s]

Marc Bekoff [00:39:15] [00:39:15]The ranchers have every right to be here. I mean, a lot of people criticize the ranching. Not all ranchers because they're basically grazing for free on public lands. But but, you know, like I said, I really do understand what's going on with the ranchers. And I have contact with people on the West Slope. And we may disagree on a lot of different issues. But they're pleased that somebody like me is understanding their plight. But there's alternatives out there that can work, and they need to put 100% effort into pursuing them. [36.0s]

Shelley Schlender [00:39:51] [00:39:51]All right. So you would like the state of Colorado to continue with the education for ranchers on how to deter wolves away from their livestock and perhaps add more funds into a fund to give them the resources to make this be something that they actually do, The ranchers. [18.5s]

Marc Bekoff [00:40:11] [00:40:11]Yeah. I mean, I've been told there is money there. And once again, the compensation program that gives them \$15,000 is very. [7.3s]

Shelley Schlender [00:40:19] [00:40:19]\$15,000 per cow or steer that has been killed. [5.0s]

Marc Bekoff [00:40:24] [00:40:24]Yeah. Up to that. Exactly. And they have to demonstrate that they've taken all measures, you know, non-lethal measures. [6.4s]

Shelley Schlender [00:40:32] [00:40:32] Meaning put up fences, have loud noises now and then have somebody riding the range now and then frequently to keep scaring wolves out of the territory. [11.6s]

Marc Bekoff [00:40:44] [00:40:44] Right. Hard work deter the wolves. Will it be 100% successful? Well, we we just don't know. You know, and yeah, I mean, we just don't know. [11.7s]

Shelley Schlender [00:40:56] So I great Pyrenees dogs have them out there fighting with the wolf packs. I don't know who would win.

Marc Bekoff [00:41:05] Well, it's usually when I mean, I mean, wolves are wild carnivores. And, you know, one of the feelings people have and, you know, some people think it's fluff is, you know, they're beautiful, wild carnivores. They were here and they should be back here. But the whole ecosystem where they were, say, 90 years ago has changed and the whole demography of the state has changed. And as a biologist, you know, one of the rules of thumb is that when you add or remove an animal from a particular landscape, it landscape evolves without them. And so when people said, we're putting them back where they were, no, the lands where we're putting them back or rather different from what they were in 90 years ago.

Shelley Schlender [00:41:53] Okay. [00:41:53] So you're saying it's problematic in Colorado to have ranches and wolves unless there's a huge, bigger effort to do more training, the wolves to stay away from ranches and scaring them away from ranches. [13.3s] Are you more in favor of the idea of rewilding a big section of the northwest of the entire United States and saying, okay, and this one big section that's multi-state in the Mountain West, No more ranches, no more cattle, no more sheep. We're just going to let the wolves and the beavers come back and be part of what's happening here.

Marc Bekoff [00:42:29] Well, that's that's actually almost what happened in Yellowstone, since there are no ranches in Yellowstone. But, you know, I think in this complicated world and, you know, just increasing instances of human non-human conflict, we need to we need to look at both sides. I mean, we really do. You know, I know some people say, well, hell with the ranchers, you know, they're on public land. Well, yeah, you know, you can say that, but that's not reality. And I'm kind.

Shelley Schlender [00:42:59] Of in effect, let's let's face it, a lot of ranchers, by having their sheep and their their sheep grazing on public lands in the mountains, those mountains are not being turned into ski resorts. Right. They're, in a way, being some of the most important stewards of public lands because they're holding the land in a more natural state compared to what it would be if developers had a chance to go in and build condominiums, build ski resorts, build restaurants and roads.

Marc Bekoff [00:43:28] Yeah, I talked to a guy on the West Slope and we had a similar conversation. And, you know, he said to me, I didn't want wolves here. They're here. I'm going to abide by the, you know, the rules of the road that c p w puts out. And then we had this little conversation about a resort being built near him or or him being forced out, if you will. He'd rather have the wolves. Yeah. And and stuff.

Shelley Schlender [00:43:57] But the ranchers are some of the most ethically aligned with conservation of. Natural lands in Colorado.

Marc Bekoff [00:44:06] Yeah, they they are. I mean, a lot of them, you know, just have very different views on, say, the more the moral use of animals and things like that. I'm not going to go there right now because, number one, it ain't going to stop. I mean, like I said, I'm a realist and I've been doing this for a really long time. But right now, I think that there's I think there's ways to coexist peacefully.

Shelley Schlender [00:44:32] If we can manage it. [00:44:33] If Colorado can manage to figure out a way for wolves to coexist peacefully and be in the habit of attacking elk and deer and not cattle

and sheep. And we can figure it out. We'll be the first place in the United States that ever figured that out. [17.5s]

Marc Bekoff [00:44:52] Yeah, exactly. And so what [00:44:54] my concern about what just happened with this PAC is c p w says that it's not precedent setting that may be good and that may be their good intention. But good intentions are not enough. Because I know from experience with Coyote's and others and other projects, people are going to say, Well, wait a minute, you did this, why won't you do that now? So, you know, it just opens the door for the possibility that in the future, when there's a problem and there will be problems, I, I know that when there's more wolves, what are they going to do? And I think it just opened the door to saying, okay, if there's a problem, we'll get rid of the pack. The more egregious thing right now and I really feel that as a biologist is that, my goodness, you've got this breeding pack of animals. No one really expected it would happen. I mean, not that it was going to be impossible, but when I heard about this, it blew my mind because I know carnivore biology and I thought, what's the likelihood of these animals? They get released, they go off in all different directions. They form a pair they caught, which is what we'll do. And then they mate. They find a place to live and and they produce four children. And like I said, they are the DNA for future wolf packs. And they're gone. They it you know, people said, well, will we introduce the mother and the pups? That's not who they were. [86.9s]

Shelley Schlender [00:46:22] [00:46:22] And so I think we've lost a mother and pups. But on the other hand, we might have lost them anyway if the if the male was not able to was injured and was not able to make provide food, then that mother probably could not have kept her pups alive. [13.9s]

Marc Bekoff [00:46:38] [00:46:38] I think she could have. And I think the pups would have gained predatory experience on their own. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, because the situations in the wild where packs naturally disassemble, you know. So, I mean, the thing is and once again, you know, because I study animal emotions, these animals are whacked out. I mean, they were whacked out when they were caught in Oregon, Oregon. They were whacked out on the flight here. They were whacked out when they were released. And not saying that and then totally negative way. But I haven't seen any discussion in the press about the psychological state of these animals. And and and, you know, ten years ago, 15 years ago, people would say, you're nuts. Who cares? They're not emotional. Yeah, they are. And when you watch Wild animals and you talk to the people studying animals up in Yellowstone Park, like Rick MacIntyre, who's written five wonderful books, The Emotional Lives of these Animals is key to understanding their behavior. [57.5s]

Shelley Schlender [00:47:36] Well, we know with Coyote's that if you lose the matriarch or the patriarch of a coyote family, then the youngsters become juvenile delinquents.

Marc Bekoff [00:47:45] They can, right? They can. I'm not so worried about that. [00:47:49] What I'm so worried about would be the fact that you're losing an adult who can have some traditional knowledge of where to move, where the food is, and protect the group. I mean, I've said it in print and I'll say it now, that the decimation of this pack is a disaster. It's a disaster for the pack. And they got rid of the basic roots for the future of wolves in Colorado. [27.6s]

Shelley Schlender [00:48:18] Okay, [00:48:18] So got to start over again. Back to the chalkboard. [2.7s]

Marc Bekoff [00:48:22] It's back to the chalkboard. But once again, you know, the mandate, the mandate by the people was that there will be more wolves here. And once again, I'm I'm. Do I want more wolves? Yeah. Do I want more wolves who can live wolf appropriate lives and not be killed or trapped or move because they happen to eat livestock every now and again? I do. But if you do the math. I have no idea how an increase. Even even fourfold. Let's just imagine. 40 more wolves. Okay. How? It's how they're going to exist conflict free. I'm not I hate to say anything's impossible, but I think it's highly improbable. And so the situation that was reached a few weeks ago with this, the wolves with denning on this ranch is inevitable. It to me and I hope I'm wrong. It's inevitable there's going to be further, Wolf, human conflicts. And it's inevitable that they're going to be even more. What would be the word stronger? They're going to be really stronger.

People are going to get really upset because there's going to be more packs who are going to be trying to take more food animals.

Shelley Schlender [00:49:47] [00:49:47] Marc Bekoff, Thank you. [0.7s]

Marc Bekoff [00:49:49] [00:49:49] You're welcome. Hi. Hi. I don't know what to say because I really feel like I'm in a personal bind. I want them here, but I want them out in the wild. [8.3s]

Shelley Schlender [00:49:59] And we've got a lot of people in Colorado.

Marc Bekoff [00:50:02] And we have a lot of people in Colorado. Exactly. Well.

Shelley Schlender [00:50:08] ~~You're still talking. Okay. So. So~~ do you think that the wolves that were captured from the ranch up near Granby or wherever it was. If they had been hazed more, if they'd been, you know, scared and a lot of aggressive attention that way, would they have just moved their den at some point?

Marc Bekoff [00:50:30] [00:50:30] Yeah, I think the wolves would have moved on, especially as the pups become more mobile. And they were pretty you're pretty mobile as a, you know, three month old wolf pup. Yeah, because because, once again, you know, they're going to just do the calculus in their head. We're not wanted here and we're going to move on as a as a group. And they're going to be looking once again for elk and easy prey. But yeah, I. [23.9s]

Shelley Schlender [00:50:55] [00:50:55] You wish that they had been hazed so much near this ranch that the wolf said this is not easy prey after all, this is a complicated, unpleasant situation and scary. We better get out of here and go find a place away from humans. [15.5s]

Marc Bekoff [00:51:12] [00:51:12] Right. If their lives had been made miserable or more miserable, at some point, they most likely would have moved on. Right. And it's known that wolf packs move from place to place. [12.4s]

Shelley Schlender [00:51:25] [00:51:25] Are you concerned that because this wolf pack was moved when it was now granted, the ranchers were saying these wolves who killed too many of our cattle and sheep, it's just way out of sight from what we were expecting. We can't handle this. If Colorado Parks and Wildlife had said, okay, we're going to be really aggressive at hazing these wolves and we're going to watch for them to move on by themselves, that would have given a better chance to all the wolves that we're thinking will reintroduce to Colorado. We have eight, ten wolves right now. The goal is about 200 wolves in Colorado. This isn't the right way to start, is to just get them out of there and recapture them and put them back in human sanctuaries. [46.5s]

Marc Bekoff [00:52:12] [00:52:12] Yep. I think if c p w said we're not killing the wolves or not moving the wolves and we're going to get much more aggressive and you on the ground out there have to get much more aggressive on it, you know, getting rid of the. [13.1s]

Shelley Schlender [00:52:26] [00:52:26] Wolves and maybe will give you compensation for being more aggressive. You know, we'll do some things to help you be more aggressive. But that's the tactic we want to take here. [9.0s]

Marc Bekoff [00:52:35] [00:52:35] Yep. Yes, I think that that would have been a lot better. I mean, I just I'm against killing animals. And this situation is to me is it's biologically and ethically indefensible biologically, because we know that when you remove the male of a group or a leader of the group or part of the, say, part of a wolf pack, it will, you know, disassemble. And then you've got a bunch of animals, including young animals, who have no idea what's going on. And it's ethically indefensible. We brought them here and we need to take care of them and we let them down. And the wolf's perspective, I'm sure, is why don't you just leave us in Oregon? So [41.8s] some people will say, well, you know, if they were or somebody said to me, well, if they were in Oregon, they might get shot. Well, trap killed. That's what happened here. So, you know, [00:53:30] I'm a hands off person and the hands off the hands off attitude about wildlife conservation is simply you've got to work with both sides. So, yes, I think that Colorado Parks and Wildlife should have said, we're not killing these wolves we're not moving these wolves and

we're going to go hellbent right on this guy's ranch because that's where it happened, to get rid of the wolves, deter them, drive them off, harass them with ATVs, do anything you have to to get them off this guy's ranch. And you, by the way, rancher, you have been denied a chronic depredation permit, which means you didn't do enough. [41.0s]

Shelley Schlender [00:54:14] We don't have the details on that. But but you think that in general, there's probably a lot more that can be done to scare wolves away from ranches?

Marc Bekoff [00:54:22] Well, there is there are details because the chronic depredation permit that was denied is it's been redacted and it's available to the public.

Shelley Schlender [00:54:33] I mean, that's a story for another day.

Marc Bekoff [00:54:35] Yeah. Yeah. But it's known. I mean, it's official. You know, you can go online and you can in fact, in some of my articles, I've got a link to it and it's right there in Redacted, as you know, probably as they had to do.

Shelley Schlender [00:54:48] So the charge was that this this rancher could have done more to scare the animals away.

Marc Bekoff [00:54:53] Absolutely.