

Wolves and Warfare in the History of the Low Countries, 1000-1800

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The connection between warfare and an increased wolf presence or even wolf attacks is a recurrent theme in European narrative sources. Many historical studies have also commented on the widespread belief in this connection and suggested that armed conflicts instigated a breakdown of the standard wolf-human relationship. In peacetime, wolves generally avoided humans and remained outside human communities. This article argues that the close link between wolves and warfare in the history of the Low Countries is far more the result of a complex interplay between human perceptions of nature and the ecological impact of combat. Wolves could only profit from human conflict in very specific circumstances, yet these exceptions became part of a widespread narrative since the High Middle Ages, because they confirmed peoples' association of wolves with wilderness. This narrative also explains why wolf hunting exhibited strong similarities to fighting human enemies.

Het verband tussen oorlog en een toenemende aanwezigheid van wolven, of zelfs aanvallen van wolven, is een terugkerend thema in Europese literaire bronnen. Het is niet verwonderlijk dat ook veel geschiedwetenschappelijke studies wijzen op deze connectie en opperen dat gewapende conflicten de gebruikelijke relatie tussen wolf en mens verstoorden. In vredetijd vermeden wolven mensen over het algemeen en bleven ze ver van menselijke bewoning. Dit artikel beargumenteert echter dat de nauwe associatie tussen wolven en oorlogsvoering in de geschiedenis van de Lage Landen veeleer het resultaat is van een complexe wisselwerking tussen menselijke percepties van natuur en de ecologische impact van oorlog. Wolven konden slechts in bijzondere omstandigheden van oorlogsvoering profiteren, maar deze uitzonderingen werden niettemin onderdeel van een wijdverspreid literair topos vanaf de Hoge Middeleeuwen omdat ze de menselijke associatie van wolven met wildernis bevestigden. Dit topos verklaart ook waarom wolvenjacht grote gelijkenissen vertoonde met de strijd tegen menselijke vijanden.

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After an absence of more than a century, the wolf (*canis lupus*) has finally returned to the Low Countries. During the summer of 2018, Belgian and Dutch environmentalists and biologists welcomed the first wolf packs in their respective states. The appearance of these animals is a logical result of a more general comeback of the animal in Europe, with migrating individuals from French or German populations being sighted in the Benelux as early as 2011. The establishment of wolf packs is also a powerful sign that the efforts of conservationists in the last few decades have had a tangible effect. However, other symbols of wilderness that have recently returned to the Low Countries, such as the beaver, lynx, otter and white-tailed eagle, do not inspire the same strong emotions as the wolf does. The question whether wolves pose a threat to humans and their livestock divides public opinion. In December 2019, the Belgian justice system was strongly pressured by the public to open an inquiry into the disappearance of Naya. She was the first wolf to establish herself permanently in Flanders and lived on the military site Kamp van Beverlo. Almost two years later, in October 2021, the Dutch government started a similar investigation after a dead wolf was found in Stroe, Gelderland. The animal had been shot.¹

This fascination with wolves, which can be observed throughout Europe, is also reflected in historical research. Numerous studies have been published on the history of wolf-human relations, with topics ranging from wolf hunting to werewolves.² Most of these works – and those on the Low Countries are no exception – tend to focus on the local or national perspective.³ Few attempts have been made so far to cross political or linguistic

1 <http://www.welkomwolf.be>; <https://www.wolvenin nederland.nl>.

2 Willem de Blécourt (ed.), *Werewolf Histories*. Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic 1 (London 2015). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-52634-2>; Kieran Hickey, *Wolves in Ireland: A Natural and Cultural History* (Dublin 2011); Patrick Masius and Jana Sprenger (eds.), *A Fairytale in Question: Historical Interactions Between Humans and Wolves* (Cambridge 2015); Karen R. Jones, *Wolf Mountains: A History of Wolves Along the Great Divide* (Calgary 2002); Jean-Marc Moriceau, *Histoire du méchant loup: 3000 attaques sur l'homme en France xve-xxe siècle* (Paris 2007); Jean-Marc Moriceau, *L'homme contre le loup: Une guerre de deux mille ans* (Paris 2011); Gherardo Ortalli, *Lupi genti culture: Uomo e ambiente nel*

medioevo (Turin 1997); Michel Pastoureau, *Le loup: Une histoire culturelle* (Paris 2018); Aleksander Pluskowski, *Wolves and the Wilderness in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge 2006).

3 Bart De Groof, 'De wolf (*canis lupus*). Angst en vervolging in de Nederlanden', *De Brabantse Folklore en Geschiedenis* 282 (1994) 125-146; Marie-Hélène Delguste-van der Kaa, *Histoire des loups dans les deux Luxembourg* (Rossignol 2003); Jan de Rijk, 'Wolven in Nederland: een samenvatting van de historische gegevens', *Huid en Haar* 4:4 (1985) 73-84; Jan de Rijk, 'Wolven (*Canis lupus*) op de Veluwe van 1596 tot 1630', *Huid en Haar* 6:3 (1987) 71-75; Benoît Goffin (ed.), *Ô loup! De nos campagnes à nos imaginaires* (Morlanwelz 2012); Gie Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen. Het verdwijnen van de wolf in Vlaanderen* (Mechelen 2002).

boundaries. The objective of this article is therefore to provide a basis for a more extensive analysis of the history of wolves in the Low Countries as a whole, including Dutch-, French-, and German-speaking areas, by focusing on one particularly controversial aspect of wolf-human interactions: the association of these animals with warfare. More precisely, I examine the assumed relationship between warfare and the increased presence of wolves. The High Middle Ages (1000-1300) are used as a starting point for two reasons: the availability of source material and the occurrence of key changes in the wolf-human relationship. The survey ends at around 1800 because wolves were exterminated in the Benelux during the nineteenth century.⁴

The idea that warfare leads to an expansion of wolf populations, and even wolf attacks, is a recurrent theme in many historical texts, especially narrative sources. Given the predominance of this perception it is hardly surprising that many historians have commented on it as well. They conclude that the lack of repression of the wolf during armed conflicts might have created circumstances that allowed the species to thrive. Some also take the assertions of contemporaries, namely that the presence of unburied corpses encouraged wolves to attack humans, at face value.⁵ Until now, however, no analysis has considered the historical associations between wolves and warfare to their full extent. The fact that the first Belgian wolf pack in more than a century chose to establish itself on a military site, an enormous uninhabited space that provides an abundance of potential prey, is only the latest addition to a diverse range of connections between wolves and armed forces. This article therefore uses the idea that warfare leads to a significant increase in the number of wolves as a basis and combines the evidence provided in narrative texts with administrative sources and modern biological studies to assess whether wolves really took active advantage of armed conflicts to become a more dominant actor in the wolf-human relationship.

The article argues that the perceived association between wolves and warfare in the history of the Low Countries is in fact the result of a complex interplay between cultural perceptions of wolves and the actual ecological consequences of combat. It therefore contributes to a recent development in

4 Delguste-van der Kaa, *Histoire des loups*, 104-112; Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 46-51, 238-245.

5 De Rijk, 'Wolven op de Veluwe'; Hickey, *Wolves*, 68-70; Alexander Kling, 'War-Time, Wolf-Time: Material-Semiotic Knots in the Chronicles of the Thirty Years' War', in: Masius and Sprenger (eds.), *A Fairytale in Question*, 19-38; Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 35, 115-117; Moriceau, *L'homme contre le loup*, 75-92; Martin Rheinheimer, 'The Belief in Werewolves and the Extermination of Real Wolves in Schleswig-Holstein', in: Masius

and Sprenger (eds.), *A Fairytale in Question*, 41-42; Stefan Siemer, 'Wölfe in der Stadt: Wahrnehmungsmuster einer Tierkatastrophe am Beispiel des Journal d'un Bourgeois de Paris', in: Dieter Groh, Michael Kempe and Franz Mauelshagen (eds.), *Naturkatastrophen: Beiträge zu Ihrer Deutung, Wahrnehmung und Darstellung in Text und Bild von der Antike bis ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen 2001) 359-365; Jay M. Smith, *Monsters of the Gévaudan: The Making of a Beast* (Cambridge/London 2011) 60-106.

animal studies, which emphasises animals as active agents rather than just as passive victims of human activity, and contrasts symbolic and material aspects of animal-human relations. This study also demonstrates how such relationships can be examined for wild, rather than domestic, animals in a long-term perspective.⁶ In the following sections, the article elaborates four themes: historical perceptions of wolves, the association between warfare and wolf presence, the possible influence of armed conflicts on wolf attacks, and similarities between wolf hunting and actual warfare. In this way, this article not only contributes to the history of an extraordinary animal, but also draws attention to forgotten aspects of the environmental, military and social history of the Low Countries.

Historical perceptions of wolves

Wolves and humans have long lived side by side. Despite the threat wolves posed to both people and livestock, many agricultural societies in Europe also attributed positive characteristics to the species. Germanic warriors respected wolves for their strength and endurance, and some even wore the animal's hide in battle. For the Romans, the wolf was closely associated with their own history, specifically the legend of Romulus and Remus.⁷ Wolves regularly appear in Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Carolingian poetry as well, and are typically depicted as one among several scavenger animals, as is the case in the trope of 'the Beasts of Battle' that feed on the corpses of fallen warriors.⁸

During the Middle Ages, this nuanced attitude gradually gave way to an undisguised hostility, mainly due to the influence of the Church. Clergymen came to perceive of the wolf as more than a pest or nuisance: it became a symbol of evil that threatened humanity and had to be exterminated. In early medieval hagiography, for example, clerical writers portrayed the wolf as an enemy that the holy person has to overcome. Charlemagne also issued regulations regarding wolf hunting in 800 and 813, ordering each of his representatives to employ two specialised wolf

6 Steve Baker et al. (eds.), *Killing Animals: A Spectrum of Scholarship on Humans' Deadly Relationship with Animals* (Champaign 2006); Hilda Kean and Philip Howell (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Animal-Human History* (London 2018); Anna Lisa Taylor, 'Where are the Wild Things? Animals in Western Medieval European History', *History Compass* 16:3 (2018) 1-12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12443>.

7 Delguste-van der Kaa, *Histoire des loups*, 13; Pastoureau, *Le loup*, 15-34; Pluskowski, *Wolves and*

the Wilderness, 134-142; Mika Rissanen, 'Was There a Taboo on Killing Wolves in Rome?', *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 107:2 (2014) 125-147; Michael P. Speidel, *Ancient Germanic Warriors. Warrior Styles From Trajan's Column to Icelandic Sagas* (London 2004) 10-32.

8 Roberta Frank, 'Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences Have a Skaldic Tooth?', *Scandinavian Studies* 59:3 (1987) 348-350.

hunters and send him the skins of all killed animals, but it is unclear how effective his legislation was. This different attitude towards wolves was partially related to changing environmental circumstances: in Late Antiquity wilderness – uncultivated land – became more common as a result of a general demographic decline, which could have made uncontrolled nature and the animals representing it, such as wolves, more threatening. At the same time several animals, notably the brown bear and wild boar, were diabolised by the medieval Church because of their association with paganism.⁹

The changing perception of wolves in Europe from ordinary animals into man-killing beasts fully developed during the High Middle Ages, which was also a period of major agricultural expansion.¹⁰ This was equally the case in the Low Countries. In the early eleventh century, the clergyman and teacher Egbert of Liège wrote down a story about a young girl whose red cape, given to her at her baptism, protected her from wolf attacks. This is the oldest written version of a folk tale later known as *Little Red Riding Hood*.¹¹ Two hundred years later, Thomas of Cantimpré, a Dominican friar and theologian from Brabant, claimed in his *De natura rerum* (1228-1244) that wolves cannot forget the sweetness of human flesh after feeding on a man's corpse.¹² The beast fable of *Ysengrimus* by contrast, which was composed in Ghent in a monastic milieu in the mid-twelfth century and laid the basis for the literary cycle *Reynard the Fox*, depicted the wolf as a strong yet stupid animal.¹³

During the High Middle Ages, wolves also became closely associated with outlaws and criminals because they lived outside or on the edges of society, in the 'wilderness' or uncontrolled nature. As a result, wolves became a symbol of disorder from both a social and an environmental point of view.¹⁴ The customs of the city of Mechelen in Brabant, dating to 1310, stipulated that if citizens were unable to arrest an outlaw, they had to call after him, cry, and search, in the same way as a wolf was followed by cock crowing and dog barking.¹⁵ Henricus Costerius, a parish priest from Lokeren in Flanders,

9 Moriceau, *L'homme contre le loup*, 67-74; Michel Pastoureau, *L'ours: Histoire d'un roi déchu* (Paris 2007) 123-152; Pastoureau, *Le loup*, 37-55.

10 Delguste-van der Kaa, *Histoire des loups*, 17; Ortalli, *Lupi genti culture*, 68-72.

11 Jan M. Ziolkowski, *Fairy Tales From Before Fairy Tales. The Medieval Latin Past of Wonderful Lies* (Ann Arbor 2007) 100-124. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.105158>.

12 Thomas of Cantimpré, *De natura rerum*, Helmut Boese (ed.) (Berlin 1973) 143-145.

13 Pastoureau, *Le loup*, 59-65.

14 Steven Wayne Isaac, 'Le loup et le mercenaire: une métaphore d'exclusion au XIIe siècle', *Cahiers*

de Civilisation Médiévale, xe-xiie siècles 59 (2016) 143-158; Pluskowski, *Wolves and the Wilderness*, 25-72; Siemer, 'Wölfe in der Stadt'.

15 Dogs will obviously start barking and growling when they see a wolf. The cock crowing, on the other hand, is purely symbolic. It announces the coming of Christ who will drive away all evil and darkness. Raymond van Aerde, 'Het oudste politiereglement van Mechelen 1310: "dit es de core brief vander stad van Mechelen"', *Handelingen van de Mechelse Kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst* 40 (1935) 153-154.

summed up the seven plagues that struck his village in 1587: wolves, freebooters ('wolves on two legs'), werewolves, sorcerers, war, high grain prices, and famine.¹⁶ During the early modern period, wolf cadavers were often displayed in public spaces in a similar way to the bodies of executed criminals to discourage other potential malefactors. The STAM (Gentse Stadsmuseum) still has a wolf paw in its collection that was probably nailed to the gate of Gravensteen Castle in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century.¹⁷

This very association with wilderness made the wolf, paradoxically, also an animal to be admired. While clerical attitudes towards wolves were generally negative, medieval noblemen showed the same admiration for the animal as their Germanic forebears. Wolves and wolf heads were sometimes used in heraldry and a number of noblemen even tried to raise young wolf pups as particularly ferocious hunting dogs, but seem to have been largely unsuccessful in this regard.¹⁸ Count Robert of Artois, the commander of the French army at the Battle of the Golden Spurs (1302), kept a wolf, which according to surviving financial accounts was apparently allowed to roam free and assault his subjects' livestock. The chronicler Lodewijk van Velthem, who lived in Brabant, claimed that the animal was present in the French camp before the battle, which might explain why it is no longer mentioned in any administrative source after the count's death.¹⁹ As late as 1724, Hans von Flemming, a Saxon forester and military officer, wrote down a story in his hunting manual about a feral child that lived with wolves in the Ardennes for about two years and later died fighting as a soldier under the Third Duke of Alba in the Eighty Years' War (1568-1648). He was known to be brave and chivalrous.²⁰

The ambiguous perception of wolves shows many similarities to contemporaneous attitudes towards wild boar and seems to be related to a different perception of wild animals by knights and clergymen. The latter considered both species to be symbols of evil, while noblemen saw them as

16 Jan Andries Heynshelmans van Rythove and Henricus Costerius, *Historie van d'outheit ende den voortganck des heylich, christen, catholijck, apostolijck, ende Roomsche gheloove in dese Belgische Nederlanden gepredickt van d'Apostels tijden af tegen alle nieuwichheit ende jonckheyt der vremde secten ende ketterijen* (Antwerp 1591) anno Christi 1587.

17 Anton Ervynck et al., 'De poot van de wolf aan de poort van het Steen (deel 2). Radiokoolstofdatering en genetisch onderzoek van een historisch curiosum', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent* 68 (2014) 49-57. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21825/hmgog.voio.3620>

Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 126.

18 John Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting* (London 1988) 134; Pastoureau, *Le loup*, 84.

19 William Chester Jordan, 'Count Robert's "Pet" Wolf', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 155:4 (2011) 404-417; Herman Vander Linden et al. (eds.), *Lodewijk Van Velthem's voortzetting van den Spiegel historiael (1248-1316)* 1 (Brussels 1906) 294-295 (verses 1635-1658).

20 Hans Friedrich von Flemming, *Der Volkommene Teutsche Jäger* (Leipzig 1724) 111.



A miniature of a wolf preying on a lamb, made in Utrecht around 1340-1350 for a copy of Jacob van Maerlant's *Der nature bloeme*. Van Maerlant wrote this work around 1270 based on Thomas of Cantimpré's *Liber de natura rerum*. National Library of the Netherlands, kw KA 16, f. 62r., [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lupus_\(wolf\)_-_Der_naturen_bloeme_-_Jacob_van_Maerlant_-_KB_KA_16_-_o62r.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lupus_(wolf)_-_Der_naturen_bloeme_-_Jacob_van_Maerlant_-_KB_KA_16_-_o62r.jpg).

worthy opponents.²¹ A good example of noble attitudes is the poem *Van den ever (On the wild boar)*, written in 1334, when Duke Jan III of Brabant had to confront a coalition of rulers from neighbouring principalities. In this poem the duke is portrayed as a wild boar and his enemies as hunting dogs that are too afraid to attack their prey. A miniature in the 1438 inventory of the charters of Brabant provides a visual equivalent to the poem, with the duke being surrounded by a pack of hunting dogs bearing the arms of the rulers who challenged him in 1334. The Duke of Bar, his only ally, is depicted as a greyhound.²²

Finally, the changing perception of wolves during the High Middle Ages is closely related to their association with warfare. From the thirteenth century onwards, medieval authors, particularly clergymen, asserted that warfare led to an increase in wolf presence and attacks on humans. Apparently unburied corpses gave them a taste for human flesh. The Cistercian Caesarius von Heisterbach provided one of the earliest examples: he claims that there were many wolves in the area around Aachen at the time Philip of Swabia was crowned twice, respectively in 1198 and 1205. This was a period of major political unrest and armed conflicts. One child was said to have disappeared when his parents left him to guard the house and fled to Aachen because of the war. It was assumed that wolves took him.²³

The link between wolf attacks and warfare seems to have been firmly established as early as the fourteenth century, for Gaston Phoebus' famous hunting manual (*Le livre de la chasse*, 1387-1389) claimed that wolves turned into man-eaters after they fed on corpses left on the battlefield.²⁴ This perceived relationship became a recurrent theme in European literature up to the eighteenth and nineteenth century.²⁵ Even Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, who wrote the influential overview of natural history *Histoire Naturelle* (1749-1804), repeated this view in 1758.²⁶ One can therefore argue

21 Moriceau, *L'homme contre le loup*, 156-157.

22 Wim van Anrooij claims that the animal bearing the arms of the Duke of Bar is a wolf. Its identification as a greyhound is more likely, however, given that the animal is indistinguishable from the hunting dogs bearing the arms of the Duke of Brabant's enemies. Furthermore, a chivalric order of the White Greyhound (*Lévrier blanc*) was founded in the Duchy of Bar in 1416 and was renamed the order of Saint-Hubert in 1422. Piet Avonds, 'Heer Everzwijn. Oorlogspoëzie in Brabant in de veertiende eeuw', *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis* 63 (1980) 17-27; Remco Sleiderink, *De stem van de meester. De hertogen van Brabant en hun rol in*

het literaire leven (1106-1430) (Amsterdam 2003)

114-115; Wim van Anrooij, *Spiegel van ridderschap. Heraut Gelre en zijn ereredes* (Amsterdam 1990) 97.

23 Caesarius von Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum II*, Josephus Strange (ed.) (Cologne 1851) vol. 2, 260-261; Ortalli, *Lupi genti culture*, 69-70.

24 Gaston Phoebus, *Le livre de la chasse*, Robert and André Bossuat (eds.) (Paris 1986) 66.

25 Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 19-20, 22-26; Moriceau, *Histoire du méchant loup*, 315.

26 Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Histoire Naturelle, générale et particulière, avec la description du Cabinet du Roi VII* (Paris 1758) 48.



▲
Coat of arms of Bernhard Wolf von Rheindorf ('Bernt van Rijndorp'), one of the three best knights named Bernard according to Claes Heynenzoon, also known as herald Gelre and herald Beyeren. The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 79 K 21 Wapenboek Beyeren, f. 62 r.

that perceptions of wolves that emerged during the Middle Ages remained dominant until the final demise of the species in Western Europe.

Warfare and wolf presence

The gradual association of wolves with disorder and evil in European medieval narrative sources is important, because it provides a necessary background to understand wolf-human relations in the past. Still, it is unclear to what extent such literary works give information about actual ecological processes. In the following two sections I therefore use other sources to approach this problem from a different angle. Financial records of the Low Countries allow a tentative reconstruction of historical population sizes. In these regions, wolves were one of the few animals that could not only be killed with impunity, just like other 'nuisance animals' such as foxes, crows, and otters, but whose hunting was actively encouraged through the issuing of bounties at district, city or village level. Because payments of such rewards have often been recorded in financial accounts, changes in the geographical distribution of wolves can be reconstructed in a way that is impossible for most other wild animals.²⁷

This approach is not without its problems: during the Middle Ages, officials paid bounties to their own hunters, but generally did not reward the general population for their efforts. It is only during the Eighty Years' War that local governments started to pay bounties to anyone presenting one or more (dead) wolves. The main exception is the County of Flanders, where castellanies maintained an extensive bounty system as early as the fourteenth century. Another issue is that in some principalities, such as Hainaut, Brabant and Liège, successful wolf hunters often went to settlements in a certain radius around the kill to claim a reward.²⁸ Thus, a systematic overview of wolves mentioned in financial accounts might give a false impression of the real number of animals present in a specific area. A significant increase in the number of bounties also does not necessarily indicate that the population grew, just that more animals died by hunting.

Despite these problems, historical sources make it clear that wolf populations did expand markedly and even spread to new areas in periods of intensive warfare, such as during the French invasions and civil war in the County of Flanders in the late fifteenth century (1483-1493), and the Eighty Years' War in Flanders, Brabant, Liège, Guelders, Utrecht, Drenthe, and Frisia. This expansion can be proven by combining complaints about

27 Paying bounties for the killing of other 'nuisance' animals only became standard practice in the Low Countries during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

28 Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 68-77.

increased wolf presence with a sharp increase in the number of bounties claimed during and in the immediate aftermath of these wars.²⁹ In the castellany of the Brugse Vrije, the rural district around Bruges, the number of bounties paid for killed wolves rose from a yearly average of eleven in 1480-1490 to 35 in 1490-1500. In the fiscal year 1493-1494, which is just after the signing of a peace treaty, the castellany paid no less than 64 bounties.³⁰

Before giving an explanation for this apparent link between warfare and wolf presence, it is worth considering the evidence provided by the recent comeback of the animal in Europe. Biological studies of European wolf packs have demonstrated that wolves are able to respond rapidly to changing circumstances, for instance by changing their reproduction rate. If wolf densities in a certain area are low almost every female in the pack reproduces. Furthermore, wolves establish dens in areas where pups' survival chances are as high as possible thanks to, for instance, few predators or traffic, and are prepared to move large distances to found a new pack in a suitable area. Migration over more than 100 kilometres is quite common. It is due to a combination of wolf adaptability and a European ban on wolf hunting that wolf populations in Germany increased by about 36 per cent each year between 2000 and 2015. Biologists have also noted that military training areas are important stepping-stones for the animal's spread throughout Germany. This might be due to the fact that these landscapes are less fragmented, which significantly heightens wolves' survival chances.³¹

Given this background the most likely explanation for a substantial growth in historical wolf populations during armed conflicts is not unburied corpses as contemporaries claimed, but rather a cluster of factors. First of all, wolf hunting often ceased or became much reduced during warfare. It was after all a labour- and/or capital-intensive activity that could include the upkeep of a pack of hunting dogs, the making and maintenance of nets, the mobilisation of all adult males for battues, the purchase of livestock to make poisoned bait, the creation of wolf pits, and the search for wolf dens to kill the

29 Archives de l'Etat à Liège (hereafter AEL), A2 Conseil privé de la principauté de Liège (hereafter CP), inv. nr. 105, f. 174r., 204v.; Anonymous, 'Wolvenjagt in de provincie Utrecht', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis, Oudheden en Statistiek van Utrecht* 6 (1840) 57-76, 59-65; De Rijk, 'Wolven in Nederland'; De Rijk, 'Wolven op de Veluwe'; Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*; Han Verschure, *Overleven buiten de Hollandse Tuin. Raamsdonk, Waspik, 's Gravenmoer, Capelle, Sprang en Besoijen tijdens de Tachtigjarige Oorlog* (Tilburg 2004) 262-268.

30 Maurits Coornaert, 'Wolven en ander ongedierte in het Brugse Vrije', *Rond de poldertorens* 10 (1968) part 1, 21-22, 26-27.

31 Ilka Reinhardt et al., 'Military training areas facilitate the recolonization of wolves in Germany', *Conservation Letters* 12:1 (2019) 1-7. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12635>; Vadim Sidorovich and Irina Rotenka, *Reproduction biology in grey wolves Canis lupus in Belarus: Common beliefs versus reality* (Minsk 2018) 214-219.

pups.³² In times of insecurity, people in the countryside fled to nearby cities or sought refuge in woodlands and other inaccessible spaces. The latter practice might have paradoxically brought them into closer contact with wolves and/or forced the animals to relocate. Secondly, wolves are intelligent and flexible creatures that might have taken active advantage of conflicts among humans by migrating over large distances, modifying their reproduction rate, and even deliberately establishing themselves in areas temporarily depopulated by war. Hunting manuals from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century identified the Ardennes as a refuge from where wolves could spread to other areas, especially during warfare.³³

However, by the 1860s wolves were largely exterminated in the woodlands of the Ardennes. They also disappeared from the Eifel and Argonne during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This explains why neither the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) nor the First World War (1914-1918) caused a significant rise in wolf presence in Belgium or Luxemburg, even though the number of wolves in France might have increased.³⁴ Overviews of paid bounties suggest that the last time wolves could actually profit from warfare in the Low Countries was the Allied invasion of 1813-1814, with the caveat that the offensive coincided with a particular harsh winter, which typically forces wolves to seek food closer to human settlements.³⁵ The close link between armed conflicts and an expansion of wolf populations therefore came to an end in the Benelux during the nineteenth century, but the belief in this relationship persisted and continued to inspire artists such as Edgar Alfred Baes.

Even before the nineteenth century, warfare in the Low Countries did not always go hand-in-hand with a substantial growth of wolf packs, as can be demonstrated by a late medieval financial account. One of the few preserved administrative sources from the medieval County of Jülich is the so-called *Fischmeister-Rechnung* from 1398-1399, which records the income and expenses of the count's steward in Vogelsang, a house or 'castle' located about two kilometres to the southeast of the city of Jülich. In this fiscal year, Duke William of Guelders-Jülich was at war with Duchess Johanna of Brabant. The steward paid for the repair of the fishing pond's dam near the castle, broken when 'those of Brabant were in the country and came from Roermond'. The account also mentions that of the 185 pigs pastured in the lordship's

32 Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk*, 135-141; Delguste-van der Kaa, *Histoire des loups*, 56-67, 75-88; Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 52-68, 81-91; Moriceau, *L'homme contre le loup*, 160-177, 185-213, 223-234.

33 Jean de Clamorgan, *Chasse au loup, nécessaire à la maison rustique* (Paris 1574) 6 r.; Louys Gruau, *Nouvelle invention de chasse pour prendre et oster*

les loups de la France (Paris 1613) 47. A Dutch translation of de Clamorgan's work was published in Amsterdam in 1588.

34 Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 238-245; Moriceau, *L'homme contre le loup*, 42, 44-45, 180.

35 Delguste-van der Kaa, *Histoire des loups*, 34, 165-166.



▲
A pack of wolves attacks a horse, which has been left wounded on the battlefield. Etching made by the Belgian artist Edgar Alfred Baes between 1847 and 1909. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, object nr. RP-P-1909-2069, <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.73352>.

woodlands ten died or were taken by wolves.³⁶ Wolves were thus hardly a major threat to the local population, economic or otherwise.

It is quite probable that warfare only facilitated the expansion or spread of wolf populations when it led to a general breakdown of law and order over a relatively large area. If we look outside the Low Countries, it is telling that the link between rising wolf numbers and warfare comes from very specific contexts: the Hundred Years' War in France (1337-1453), the Thirty Years' War in Germany (1618-1648), and Cromwell's invasion of Ireland (1649-1653).³⁷ If armed forces made efforts to reduce wanton violence against the general population or if the fighting was relatively localised, wolf hunting could probably continue and prevented these animals from spreading to other areas. The accounts of the general receiver of Hainaut demonstrate, for example, that while the cities of Binche and Le Quesnoy had to be prepared for an attack from Brabant in 1333-1334 the count's hunters still organised a wolf hunt near Valenciennes.³⁸ Also, there is no indication that the Austrian War of Succession, which affected large parts of the Low Countries in 1744-1748, caused a significant increase in wolf populations. This could reflect the general tendency at that time to avoid conflict between military and civilians and come down hard on any type of pillaging. If locals were not in danger, the countryside did not become depopulated and wolves were still persecuted.³⁹

A second major reason why the link between warfare and a growing wolf presence is not absolute is that the ecological circumstances in a given area might not be favourable to wolves. Even though the fertile lands of Hesbaye were repeatedly invaded during the medieval and early modern period and lie between the two then wolf-invested zones of the Campine and Ardennes, there is no indication that wolves have been perceived as a major problem in these times of war. Contemporary chroniclers actually claim that dogs, rather than wolves, fed on the corpses of the fallen after the Battle of Steppes (1213) and the sack of Bilzen (1483).⁴⁰ The bishops of Liège ordered their officials to organise battues in 1582 and 1711, efforts that might have been related to the Eighty Years' War and the Spanish War of Succession respectively, but these hunting activities either happened outside Hesbaye or on its periphery, namely the County of Loon, the city of Huy, and the lordship

36 Wolfgang Herborn, 'Die sogenannte Fischmeisterei-Rechnung des Jülicher Fischmeisters von 1398/1399', *Neue Beiträge zur Jülicher Geschichte* 10 (1999) 85, 88-89.

37 See note 5.

38 Leopold Devillers and Alexandre Joseph Pinchart (eds.), *Extraits des comptes de la recette générale de l'ancien comté de Hainaut, tome premier 1334-1400* (Mons 1871) 10-13.

39 Sander Govaerts, *Mosasaurs: Interactions between armies and ecosystems in the Meuse Region, 1250-1850* (PhD thesis; University of Amsterdam 2019) 155; Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 173-235.

40 Reinerus, *Annales Sancti Iacobi Leodiensis*, Ludwig Konrad Bethmann (ed.) (Liège 1874) 112; Jan Paquay (ed.), 'Kroniek der stad Bilzen uit de 15de eeuw', *Bulletin de la Société Scientifique et Littéraire du Limbourg* 33 (1915) 39.

of Horion.⁴¹ Wolves might therefore have largely avoided this densely populated area, characterised by large grain fields, where both prey (livestock or wild ungulates) and suitable habitats for the establishment of wolf dens (woodlands) were scarce.

A final element that needs to be addressed is that any increase in the number of wolves was often temporary, because their extermination became a top priority as soon as peace returned. Authorities often increased the bounties to give peasants, who were the main victims of armed conflicts, an extra financial stimulus to start hunting down the animal. Wolves were seen as a major problem in the Low Countries at the turn of the sixteenth century, but they no longer presented a threat when the fighting started again after the Twelve Years Truce (1609-1621).⁴² Wolves might have taken advantage of armed conflicts to migrate to new areas, but their appearance was hardly an inevitable ecological consequence of warfare.

Armed conflicts and wolf attacks

Historical accounts do not just establish a link between warfare and wolf presence, but also claim that warfare led to an increase in wolf attacks. This is undoubtedly the most controversial aspect of the wolf-human relationship. It is also a connection that is relatively difficult to study because it depends on sources that specify causes of death, such as parish records, which only become available in large numbers in the Low Countries from the late sixteenth century onwards. The French historian Jean-Marc Moriceau, who has produced an authoritative study of historical wolf attacks in France, has demonstrated convincingly that such assaults cannot be reduced to mere isolated incidences or an unfortunate side effect of rabies. Wolves did consider humans as prey, albeit in exceptional circumstances. The majority of their victims were children younger than twelve. While children were tasked with taking care of livestock in many communities up to the nineteenth century, this also confirms the predatory nature of wolf attacks, for they target the weakest members of a group.⁴³

Given the absence of parish records, evidence regarding wolf attacks on humans in the medieval Low Countries is rather scarce. The aforementioned tales of Egbert of Liège and Caesarius von Heisterbach indicate, however, that predatory attacks were not unknown. The threat of being attacked by wolves in the Campine in 1338 must have been credible enough for the bishop of Liège to grant the villagers of Kalmthout the right to construct a baptismal

41 AEL, A2 CP, inv. nr. 54, 16 April 1711; inv. nr. 105, f. 174r, 204v.

42 Govaerts, 'Mosasaurs', 160; Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 22-32, 173-231.

43 Moriceau, *Histoire du méchant loup*.

font in their chapel so they would not have to go to neighbouring Nispen with their newborn.⁴⁴ Contemporaries could have been stimulated to establish a link between warfare and wolf attacks, as their observations of wolves feeding on human remains and their perceptions of an increased wolf presence during armed conflicts were fed by the generally accepted idea that wolves become man-eaters after tasting human flesh. A seventeenth-century history of Drenthe, which might be based on a medieval chronicle that no longer exists, mentions that in the year 1234 people had to put heavy stones on graves in order to prevent wolves from digging up and eating the corpses. At that time, the countryside had been heavily affected by the conflict between the bishop of Utrecht and the peasantry of Drenthe in 1227-1233.⁴⁵

The most detailed evidence regarding a possible link between warfare and wolf attacks comes again from the Eighty Years' War. The significant rise in wolf numbers in many areas of the Low Countries during this period caused major problems for rural dwellers. On 24 October 1588, the castellany of Oudenaarde in Flanders asked 33 parishes to report damage caused by wolf aggression after the siege of the city of Oudenaarde in July 1582. The results of this survey, first published in 1908, have been used in earlier research regarding the history of wolves in the Low Countries, but the number of victims has been misinterpreted. The document does not indicate, as authors such as Gie Luyts have stated, that wolves killed around 150 people, wounded another 42, and attacked more than 170 domestic animals in six years, but rather that in the thirteen parishes whose responses have been preserved at least 114 people, mostly children, were killed or died because of their injuries, at least another 53 were wounded, and 34 were *verbeten* ('forbite' in English), which is a rather vague term indicating that people were attacked or bitten. In the latter case it is unclear whether the person died or survived.⁴⁶

The fact that so many people were assaulted in a relatively concise area, of probably no more than two to three hundred square kilometres, suggests that a relatively small number of wolves, possibly members of the same pack, were responsible. They had not only lost their fear of humans, but also perceived them as potential prey. Because of the ongoing fighting, villagers could not immediately respond by organising wolf hunts. In November 1588, however, the *opperjager* ('master hunter') of Flanders allowed the inhabitants

44 Petrus Josephus Goetschalckx, 'Geschiedenis der parochie Calmthout, Esschen', *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis, bijzonderlijk van het aloude hertogdom Brabant* 8 (1909) 178-179.

45 Johan Picardt, *Korte beschryvinge van eenige vergetene en verborgene antiqutieten der provintien en landen gelegen tussen de Noord-zee, de Yssel, Emse en Lippe. Waer by gevoeght zijn Annales Drenthiae* (Amsterdam 1660) 197.

46 Karen De Schepper, *De Geschiedenis van de wolvengjacht in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (16e-18e eeuw)* (Master's thesis; Ghent University 2010) 104-132; Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 107-108; Guido Tack, Paul Van den Breemt and Martin Hermy, *Bossen van Vlaanderen. Een historische ecologie* (Leuven 1993) 162; J. Walters, 'Wolven op de Kasselrij van Oudenaarde', *Cercle Archéologique et Historique d' Audenarde 2* (1908) 67-85.

of the castellany to keep hunting dogs, which might have helped to put an end to the attacks. The castellany paid only nine and five bounties for killed or captured wolves in 1587 and 1588 respectively, but nineteen and 24 in 1589 and 1590.⁴⁷

Assaults also occurred in other areas during the same period, for the parish priest Henricus Costerius claimed that wolves ate seventeen people in Lokeren in 1587-1588. He only gave details about the five ‘most gruesome’ cases concerning four children and one woman who tried to defend her horse.⁴⁸ A pamphlet, printed in Troyes in 1587, likewise claimed that a particularly ferocious wolf attacked people in the Ardennes. According to this pamphlet the beast served as God’s tool to punish people for their blasphemy.⁴⁹ The fact that both texts were printed during the Eighty Years’ War and the French Wars of Religion, a period of religious strife, is not a coincidence. Wolf aggression served as a powerful symbol for the insecurity and upheaval affecting general society. It is worth noting that the merciless persecution of wolves started more or less simultaneously with the extermination of the European brown bear in the Carolingian era. Wolves and bears are the only animals in Western Europe that have considered humans as prey and were both diabolised by the medieval Church.⁵⁰

The existence of a strong, religiously-inspired fear for wolves among the general population in the Low Countries is confirmed by another rather neglected source: werewolf trials. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries several adult males were indicted and sometimes even executed on suspicion of being a werewolf. Such prosecutions are attested in Bonheiden (Brabant), Liège, Lier (Brabant), Limbourg, Maaseik (Liège), Mechelen, Namur, Ooike, Zingem (Flanders) and Utrecht, and are part of a more general upsurge in witch trials. Werewolves were considered to be a specific kind of witch or sorcerer.⁵¹ One should not dismiss these trials as mere products of an

47 Walters, ‘Wolven’, 82-83.

48 Heynshelmans van Rythove and Costerius, *Historie*, anno Christi 1587.

49 Anonymous, *Figure d’un loup ravissant trouvé en la Forest des Ardennes. Et de la destruction par luy faicte en plusieurs bourgs, villages, & dependances d’icelle Forest. au moys de Decembre dernier passé* (Troyes 1587).

50 Pastoureau, *L’ours*, 123-152.

51 In several other cities and villages people also expressed a belief that werewolves were present, but no one was put on trial (Diest in Brabant, Hasselt in Liège, and Arlon and Remich in Luxemburg). Emile Brouette, ‘La sorcellerie dans le comté de Namur au début de l’époque

moderne (1509-1646)’, *Annales de la Société*

Archéologique de Namur XLVII (1953-1954) 374;

Marie-Sylvie Dupont-Bouchat, ‘La répression de la sorcellerie dans le duché de Luxembourg aux xv^e et xvii^e siècles’, in: Marie-Sylvie Dupont-Bouchat, Willem Frijhoff and Robert Muchembled (eds.), *Prophètes et sorciers dans les Pays-Bas, xv^e- xviii^e siècle* (Paris 1978) 56, 69; Eugène Frankignoulle, ‘Un texte curieux sur le loup-garou’, *Le Folklore Brabançon* 6 (1927) 359-360; Jozef Grauwels, *Kroniek van Hasselt (1078-1914)*. *Grepen uit het dagelijks leven* (Hasselt 1982) 78; Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 122-124; Moniek van de Ruit, ‘Een afgrijpselike ende abominabele saecke’.

Toverijprocessen in Utrecht en Amersfoort 1590-1595

overactive imagination. Most of them occurred in areas where wolves were relatively common and were provoked by a feeling that wolves exhibited abnormal, meaning extremely aggressive, behaviour. It is therefore probable that in the first decades of the Eighty Years' War, when wolf populations in the Low Countries expanded significantly and lived in relatively close contact with humans, wolf attacks on humans did in fact increase.

Wolf aggression remained a problem in some areas of the Low Countries up to the early nineteenth century, but contemporaries rarely linked these attacks to warfare. This might be related to both the changing character of warfare, with military commanders placing more emphasis on peaceful co-existence between soldiers and locals, and the gradual withdrawal of wolf populations to a handful of 'wilderness' sanctuaries, such as the Ardennes, Veluwe, Campine, Eifel, and Argonne. In the years 1810 and 1811, however, disaster struck the area around Roermond with eleven children falling victim to a predatory wolf. In this case the subprefect expressed his belief that the animal must have come from Germany. There, it could have grown accustomed to human flesh as a result of the recent wars in 1805, 1806-1807 and 1809, in which Napoleon's army battled the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian armies.⁵²

Even though some wolves might have profited from warfare to include humans among their potential prey, wolf aggressiveness towards humans should not be overestimated. For most people the risk of being attacked by a domestic animal would have been far greater than being assaulted by a predatory wolf. In the Duchy of Luxemburg about fifty couples were prosecuted for negligence involving animals during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They were each held responsible for the death of their child at the hands of a domestic or wild animal. In most cases the killer was not a wolf, but a pig.⁵³ Armed conflicts could have stimulated wolf aggression towards humans, but the impact of such incidents went far beyond actual damage done because they reinforced a prevailing assumption that wolves become man-eaters during warfare.

Wolf hunting and military tactics

Given the fact that wolves were the only animal in the Low Countries that considered humans as prey from the High Middle Ages onwards – bears became almost extinct as early as the thirteenth century – it is perhaps

(Master's thesis; Utrecht University 2008) 52-55;
Fernand Vanhemelryck, *Het gevecht met de duivel. Heksen in Vlaanderen* (Leuven 1999) 178-181.

de Franse tijd (1794-1814)', *Jaarboek Maas-en Swalmdal* 19 (1999) 108-145.

53 Dupont-Bouchat, 'La répression', 53-54.

52 Frans G.J. Geerlings and Arthur Schrijnemakers, 'Wolvenplaag in het Maas-en Swalmdal in

surprising that no study so far has analysed possible connections between killing wolves and actual warfare. The Comte de Buffon claimed in 1758 that man had declared war against the wolf and compared a wolf pack with an army that goes to war.⁵⁴ Humans persecuted, and still persecute, wolves with a hatred that did set them apart from other animals. This loathing also encouraged crossovers between hunting wolves and fighting human enemies.

One particularly important element regarding wolf hunting in the Low Countries is that there were very few officially appointed wolf hunters, such as those of the famous French *louveterie*. *Louvetiers* ('wolf catchers') were only attested to in Hainaut and Namur from the fourteenth century onwards and this probably reflects French influence.⁵⁵ In general, wolf hunting was the responsibility of a ruler's regular hunters and the general population, arrangements that became increasingly important within the Kingdom of France as well from the fifteenth century onwards.⁵⁶ The *louveterie* was only introduced in the Southern Low Countries (Belgium, Luxemburg, and the Dutch province of Limburg) in 1804, after the French takeover, and was again dissolved in 1830, after the Belgian Revolution.

The fact that wolf hunting in the Low Countries was a responsibility shared among many might have encouraged the crossover of techniques between hunting and warfare. Rural communities, for instance, employed special traps, called wolf pits, to catch these animals since at least the early Middle Ages. A wolf pit is a deep hole in the ground, typically four to five metres deep, and located on the edges of a village community.⁵⁷ They must have been a quite effective defensive measure in warfare as well, for the sixteenth-century city accounts of Maastricht call the pits dug out under the drawbridges 'wolf pits'. These were probably modelled after their rural counterparts. Hedges and ditches, a common fortification in the countryside, were also used during hunting or to protect livestock from wolves.⁵⁸

Still, the most important link between wolf hunting and warfare remained the mobilisation for and organisation of the hunt itself. Theoretically, everyone could kill wolves with impunity, but in practice noblemen did not approve of peasants walking around armed, particularly in large groups, because they considered this a threat to their hunting privileges

54 Comte de Buffon, *Histoire Naturelle* VII, 39, 42.

55 There is also one isolated reference to a *wolfvenger* ('wolf catcher') and his son, who stayed in Rosendaal Castle (Guelders) in 1392. Nicolas Amoroso et al., 'Le loup dans nos archives', in: *Ô loup ! De nos campagnes à nos imaginaires*, 249-262, 249-250; Jules Borgnet, *Cartulaire de la commune de Bouvignes I* (Namur 1862) 44; Devillers and Pinchart (eds.), *Extraits*, 58, 86; Moriceau, *L'homme contre le loup*, 253-31;

Gerard van Hasselt, *Roozendaal als de prachtigste bezitting van de Geldersche graven en hertogen en derzelve hofhouding aldaar* (Arnhem 1808) 55.

56 Corinne Beck, *Les eaux et forêts en Bourgogne ducale (vers 1350- vers 1480): Société et biodiversité* (Paris 2008) 354-359.

57 Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 82-83; Moriceau, *L'homme contre le loup*, 192-198.

58 Govaerts, 'Mosasaurus', 151-152.

as well as to the social order in general.⁵⁹ This was especially so after the introduction of firearms, which made all kinds of hunting more effective, not just wolf hunting. In practice, authorities often allowed rural dwellers to carry arms to protect themselves and their livestock, but simultaneously forbade them from using these weapons to actively hunt down wolves.⁶⁰ John IV, Duke of Brabant, for example, granted city rights to Lommel in 1422 to encourage settlement in the Campine, a sparsely populated area. The town's inhabitants received the right to walk around with bows and arrows and keep dogs with uncut claws because they lived 'in the middle of heathlands, far from all houses, and always had to be on their guard'. Yet the charter also specified that those who took advantage of these privileges and poached in the duke's hunting park (*warande*) would be prosecuted. The exact nature of the threat is not specified, but it is likely that wolves rather than human enemies were the citizens' main concern. This presumption seems all the more likely because a seventeenth-century confirmation of these privileges specifically notes that the dogs had to guard sheep flocks.⁶¹

In 1486, the inhabitants of the district (*Meijerij*) of 's Hertogenbosch, which included Lommel, received the right to persecute wolves by sounding the church bells and mobilising the general adult male population. The locals considered ducal hunters to be ineffective and also resented the tax that livestock owners had to pay to fund their hunting efforts.⁶² This charge on livestock owners was relatively common, especially in areas with specially appointed wolf catchers or *louveters*, but could be challenged if the 'professional' hunters proved unable to prevent wolf attacks.⁶³ Wolves were also perceived as a problem in Drenthe, where the Etstoel, the highest court of justice, passed a ruling in 1489 regarding wolf hunting.⁶⁴ It is very likely therefore that the political turmoil following the death of Charles the Bold at the battle of Nancy in 1477, whose corpse was mutilated by wolves before it was found, gave wolf populations in the Low Countries a chance to expand and forced rural dwellers to become involved in wolf hunting themselves.

The fact that wolf hunters were mobilised by sounding the church bells is revealing as well. It demonstrates that villagers adapted an existing military obligation for a new problem. From the High Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, sounding either the largest bell in a church or *belfort* or all the bells at once was the generally accepted sign that each household had to send an able-bodied, armed adult male to help the community resist or pursue

59 Moriceau, *L'homme contre le loup*, 172-180.

60 Delguste-van der Kaa, *Histoire des loups*, 39, 67; Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 31.

61 Josephus Petrus Wilhelmus Antonius Smit, *Het Brabantsche Jachtrecht vóór de regeering van Karel den Stouten* (PhD thesis; Universiteit van Amsterdam 1911) 147-148.

62 Annemarie Lith-Droogleeve Fortuijn, Jan Sanders and Geertrui van Synghel (eds.), *Kroniek van Peter van Os. Geschiedenis van 's Hertogenbosch en Brabant van Adam tot 1523* (The Hague 1997) 261.

63 Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 18-19, 69.

64 Frank Keverling Buisman (ed.), *Ordelen van de Etstoel van Drenthe 1450-1504 [1518]* (Zutphen 1994) 244.

a specific threat. This perceived danger could be an enemy raid or invasion, a hostile city council, or one or more criminals. That it applied to wolves as well reflects the close association between wolves and warfare, as well as between wolves and criminals.⁶⁵

During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the aforementioned military mobilisation became a central part of wolf hunting efforts throughout the Low Countries. Villagers were mobilised by sounding the bells and were divided into *rotten* or *corporaelschappen*, squads led by either a *rotmeester* or a corporal. Often a drummer also accompanied them. In this way, wolf hunting became an integral part of the military obligations of rural dwellers, which were drastically reorganised during the Eighty Years' War to deal with the problem of marauding soldiers. Even more revealing is that such militia structures continued to serve as a basis for large battues during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, at which time the militia's actual military significance had become negligible.⁶⁶ One might even say that wolf hunting was the last surviving form of military service that did not involve enlistment in governments' permanent military forces. In practice, these large drive hunts were often rather disappointing: they kept hundreds if not thousands of men from their work and only resulted in one or a few kills. Sometimes not even a single wolf could be shot. The officials in charge of the hunt typically blamed the underwhelming results on villagers' lack of discipline, accusing men of leaving their assigned posts or of taking advantage of the situation to poach.⁶⁷

In this context, it is noteworthy that soldiers in the Low Countries never became involved in wolf hunting in any significant way, even though a lone wolf attacked a sentry outside the fortress of Luxemburg in January 1802.⁶⁸ This might reflect different priorities, but also the unsuitability of their training. Early modern European armed forces emphasised firing rapidly rather than accurately. When the subprefect of Roermond wanted to hunt down a predatory wolf in November 1810 (see above), he requested the use of 5360 drivers, 573 hunters, and 255 soldiers, but received no cooperation from the military.⁶⁹ The most significant contribution of soldiers to wolf hunting might therefore have been in their creation of special hunting reserves. Military governors, who were always members of noble families, appropriated specific areas near their garrison as hunting grounds and employed gamekeepers to manage them. We know that these 'military' gamekeepers killed one or more wolves near the castle of Montfort (Guelders)

65 Govaerts, 'Mosasaurs', 88.

66 De Groof, 'De wolf', 133, 136-137; Delguste-van der Kaa, *Histoire des loups*, 78-88; De Rijk, 'Wolven in Nederland', 78-81; Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 27-29.

67 Delguste-van der Kaa, *Histoire des loups*, 80-92; Geerlings and Schrijnemakers, 'Wolvenplaag', 115-142; Moriceau, *L'homme contre le loup*, 236-244.

68 Delguste-van der Kaa, *Histoire des loups*, 20.

69 Geerlings and Schrijnemakers, 'Wolvenplaag', 137.

in 1597, and the city of 's Hertogenbosch in 1697 and 1753.⁷⁰ Even though for many rural dwellers wolf hunting was an integral part of maintaining safety in the countryside, the military as an organisation never became a driving force behind the extermination of wolves in the Low Countries.

Conclusion

The connection between wolves and warfare in the history of the Low Countries is clearly more than a literary topos. It is based on a complex interplay between human perceptions of nature and the actual ecological impact of armed conflicts. Wolves could profit from warfare by reproducing more successfully and spreading to new regions, but only if the conflict was so disruptive that ongoing hunting efforts had to be put on hold across large areas and the war-affected lands provided a suitable habitat. This particular set of circumstances occurred during some medieval conflicts, the Eighty Years' War, and the invasion of France in 1813-1814.

The link between warfare and wolf presence is thus not absolute, but became firmly established in the mindset of human communities during the High Middle Ages, because clerical authors considered the animal to be a symbol of evil. The wolf's endurance, intelligence, and flexibility in combination with real attacks on humans set it apart from other animals demonised by the medieval Church, such as the brown bear and wild boar. Wolves presented a challenge to humans' self-declared mastery of the natural world in a way that no other animal in the Low Countries could. The intense hatred with which wolves were persecuted and killed derives from this perceived threat, and explains why wolf hunting exhibited strong similarities to warfare against humans. This also raises questions as to whether our concept of warfare should include conflicts between humans and other animals as well.

This article demonstrates how historical relations between wild animals and humans can be studied from a long-term perspective and how different sources can be combined to present a less human-centred narrative. It also draws attention to the diverse ways different species adapt both to each other and to the changing world around them. Most research on historical animals focuses on the nineteenth and twentieth century, and to a lesser extent on domesticated or captive animals, whose room to manoeuvre is obviously more limited than that of the wolves examined here. Wild wolves in the Low Countries were not only capable of devising different survival

70 Jos Cremers, 'Beredeneerde voorloopige lijst der in Limburg in 't wild voorkomende zoogdieren I.a. *Canis lupus L. de wolf*', *Natuurhistorisch Maandblad* 17:11 (1928) 158; Luyts, *Met vryaerts en resoelen*, 252, 254; Moriceau, *L'homme*

contre le loup, 399; H. van Bavel et al. (eds.), *De kroniek van het St. Geertruijklooster te 's-Hertogenbosch. Die chronijcke der Stadt ende Meijerije van 's-Hertogenbosch. Een tekstuitgave* ('s Hertogenbosch 2001) 415.



Hunters kill a wolf during a battue. Note that most of them carry spears or clubs rather than guns. Detail of an engraving made in Antwerp between 1582 and 1586 by Adriaen Collaert (c. 1560-1618) after Hans Bol (1534-1593). Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, object nr. RP-P-1889-A-514919, <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.96982>.

strategies to escape persecution, but could actually take advantage of external events over which they had no control, such as warfare, to become a more dominant actor in the wolf-human relationship.

Many aspects of the wolves' relationship with humans are still uncertain. We do not know for instance how important warfare was in comparison to other environmental factors such as rabies or harsh winters when it comes to explaining wolf presence and wolf attacks on humans. It is also unclear how many wolves lived in the Low Countries at any single point in its history. The answers to such questions require a systematic examination of all available evidence, historical and archaeological, regarding wolf presence in Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, and adjacent areas across a time frame of more than one thousand years. The need for such research could make itself felt during the next decade, for the current situation is unprecedented: wolves have returned to the Low Countries and hunting them is forbidden. The worst thing we can do now is to underestimate these remarkable animals, especially wolves' ability to overcome human strategies to control them, and allow their enemies to restart their thousand-year-old war again.

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