



The lynx and the wolf will soon have to share the same real estate. The arrangement may prove to be beneficial to the lynx. (Courtesy of the USFWS)

Predator match-up: Wolf v. lynx

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By Mark Rackay

With all that has gone on in our wonderful little corner of Valhalla during the past 18 months, seems that one thing has excelled: controversy. The true survivor of conflict and compromise. Someone much smarter than me once said, “A good compromise leaves everyone angry.”

A major point of controversy on the Western Slope has been the reintroduction of wolves. We have all listened to the argument from both sides, and the popular voice of the outdoor people and the ranchers lost. The wolf is coming back. I am not sure how you reintroduce something that is already here. Seems like a task you cannot fail at.

One of the very successful reintroductions Colorado has seen would have to be the Canada lynx. They are doing well here thanks to the efforts of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife. With the success of the lynx, a reader posed the question about what the wolf will do to the lynx, as the wolf is a definite enemy of the lynx. This is something I have thought about as well, not to mention our already troubled deer and elk.



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

If we start with the tale of the tape, the wolf has the definite edge. A male wolf can weigh in up to 180 pounds and reach a length of 5 feet. A lynx, on the other hand is much smaller, weighing up to 25 pounds and reaching a length of 3 ½ feet. The size advantage rests with the wolf.

On the other hand, we need to discuss weaponry, and here the lynx is the hands down winner. Both have powerful jaws and bold mandibles of death in their mouth. The lynx, however, has the niftiest four sets of retractable claws, that are as sharp as an IRS auditor’s pencil. They grab their prey with the powerful jaw and use those claws to shred their prey. All you see is a buzzsaw of claws tearing apart whatever they went after.

The largest member of the lynx family is the Eurasian lynx that lives in

the Russian forests. This lynx’s major predator is the grey wolf. Remember that the wolf hunts in packs, and the pack can easily overpower the lynx. One on one, it is a close match to say the least.

The lynx has several defenses that the wolf does not enjoy. One is the lynx is very stealthy, and moves silently through the woods, rarely exposing himself. The wolf, on the other hand, moves in packs, making more noise than a Panzer division as he moves through the woods. It is rare that a wolf can sneak up on a lynx. More often than not, the lynx gets killed because he got caught in an open area and had no place to go.

Another defense the lynx has that the wolf does not is the ability to climb trees. A lynx can very quickly shoot up a tree, leaving a pack of wolves below wondering where he went. The wolf will soon tire of waiting and look elsewhere for a meal.

A study conducted by Wildlife Society Bulletin suggests that the reintroduction of the wolf can actually help the lynx. The major food source of the Canada lynx is the snowshoe hare. In many areas, the hare population

is dwindling, thereby putting a stress on the lynx population.

The wolf is known to help keep a tight leash on mesopredator, those carnivores beneath the top predator, such as the coyote. Wolves are known to harass and kill coyotes and keep them in check. Coyote populations taper off anytime there are wolves present.

Lately, coyote populations have been booming. Because their numbers are doing so well, they are eating most of the snowshoe hares, as well as anything else they can find. Wolves help control the coyotes by killing them and through the disruption of their behavior using what is called the ecology of fear. The ecology of fear means that coyotes will be far more wary to venture into certain areas if they know wolves are present.

When wolves were killed off throughout the United States, it helped trigger a mesopredator explosion, wherein these lower predators, like coyotes, began to run rampant. With the absence of wolves, the coyote densities expanded in the U.S., into the Midwest, southern states, and as far north as Newfound-

land and Alaska. As the range expanded, so did the population. This had a major impact on the lynx.

Bottom line, the reintroduction of the wolf may actually help the lynx, rather than hurt them. Sound science suggests that supporting current wolf populations, while considering reintroductions of wolves in viable lynx habitat, could be the key to the survival of the lynx in North America.

Wolf politics has never depended on their ecological value, instead bouncing between wolf lovers and wolf haters. Several years ago, Congress took away the protection of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) from the wolf in the Northern Rockies, thereby opening the door for them to be hunted once again. This was the first time any animal has been taken off the ESA list by congress.

As far as the match-up between the two, I doubt we will see much difference in the population of either as the numbers are fairly small. Lynx in Colorado number near 200, and the wolf populations we are discussing are much smaller yet.

The wolf and the lynx got along for thousands of years in North America, neither one wiping out the other. The only trouble either one ever had, came about when man got involved.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77@icloud.com

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