

# INTERNATIONAL WOLF

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Courtesy of Diane Boyd



Diane Boyd

Yolanda Cortés



Courtesy of Yolanda Cortés

# Women *and* Wolves

Courtesy of Shannon Barber-Meyer

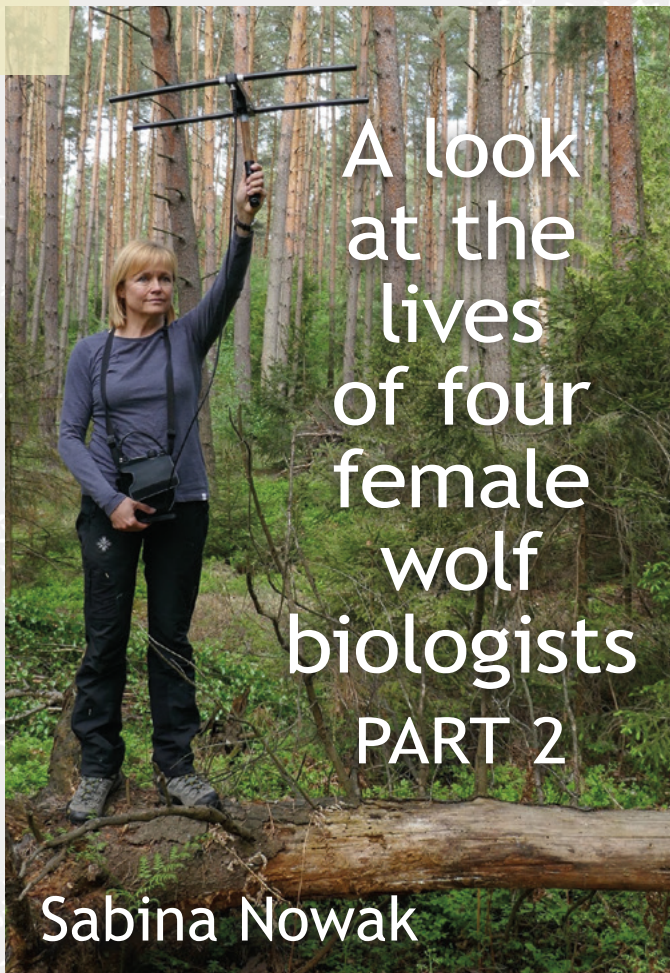


Shannon Barber-Meyer

By DEBRA MITTS-SMITH

A look  
at the  
lives  
of four  
female  
wolf  
biologists  
PART 2

Sabina Nowak



Robert Mysłajek

The Fall 2019 issue of *International Wolf* introduced readers to four women biologists who study wolves in the wild. This article continues to explore their work, its impact on people and wolves, and an essential aspect of wild animal research that's easy to overlook: Working with wolves means working with people.

The wolf is an environmental success story. Whether through reintroduction or recolonization, many wolf populations are thriving. Yet, obstacles to the wolf's long-term survival remain. As Dr. Shannon Barber-Meyer said, there are no ambivalent feelings about the wolf. Most people tend to react strongly to it; they love the species or hate it, idealize it or demonize it. Whether interacting one-on-one, or talking to groups of people about wolves, wolf biologists must navigate those emotions.

In the 1990s, Dr. Sabina Nowak, a Polish biologist, began advocating for government protection of declining lynx and wolf populations in her homeland. Dealing with the public as well as government officials, Nowak had to overcome deep-seated fears. Using data collected by wildlife biologists at the Mammal Research Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAS) in Białowieża, she worked to change the Polish people's attitudes about lynxes and wolves through public talks, seminars, leaflets and press releases. By 1995, she had helped collect more than 80,000 signatures and gained full protection for the lynx across Poland, and partial protection for the wolf. Over the next two years, she and her colleagues met with Polish ministers and members of parliament to persuade them to extend protections for the wolf, and in 1998 they won protection for wolves across the whole of Poland.

Nowak and her husband and co-worker, Dr. Robert Mystajek, have continued to work with the Polish government to establish a national system of

compensation for livestock depredation caused by wolves and to construct a network of ecological corridors and fauna over- or under-passes across highways, connecting wolf habitats and reducing the number of wolves and other wild animals killed by vehicles.

In the early days of wolf conservation, saving the wolf often required strenuous effort. In 1979, one of Dr. Diane Boyd's first jobs was trapping "problem wolves" that were preying on livestock, and it was a new learning experience for her. Working for Dr. Steven Fritts of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in north central Minnesota, Boyd's task was to capture and transport nuisance wolves to the Grand Rapids office, where they would be humanely euthanized.

"The belief behind this practice was that every problem wolf caught and removed would spare the lives of other wolves—wolves who were not killing and eating livestock. It was a tough line to walk, but we believed it was the best way to stave off the poisoning of wolves and wolf packs by humans," she says.

Although wolf predation on livestock remains a challenge, people representing various factions of the wolf-human conflict are working to find new ways to co-exist with wolves.

In Spain, Dr. Yolanda Cortés's main field work consists of reducing and preventing livestock losses by making the presence of the wolf more acceptable.

In 2004, to improve coexistence of large carnivores and agricultural communities, and reduce wolf depredation on livestock, institutions in five European countries, including Spain, started the LIFE COEX project funded by the European Union. Cortés coordinated the donation and distribution of more than 75 livestock guarding dogs, 30 mobile electric fences and 15 conventional fences throughout Spain. According to Cortés, the numbers of attacks and dead livestock in participating holdings diminished between 65 and 100 percent.

Today Cortés, who now works for World Wildlife Fund Spain, continues to teach shepherds and livestock breeders how to protect their animals. "This work is mainly in areas recently recolonized by wolves—places where the old shepherding knowledge and traditions disappeared when the species was exterminated. Now that the wolf is back, we need to revive that traditional knowledge," she explains.

Cortés is also involved in two other LIFE projects. LIFE Euro Large Carnivores tries to improve coexistence with large carnivores in 16 European countries through communication, transboundary

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**Yolanda Cortés**

cooperation and knowledge exchange. The other, LIFE Southern Wolves, focuses on increasing the acceptance of the wolf by rural communities in southern Spain's Sierra Morena, site of the only decreasing wolf population in Europe.

Today in Montana, part of Dr. Diane Boyd's work involves finding new ways to keep wolves and livestock both safe and separated. "If wolves are to survive, then new methods of keeping wolves and livestock apart need to be developed and tested," she says.

Boyd understands that ranching is more than just economics. "It is a way of life, part of each individual's and family's identification—a valued tradition." She believes that one must respect these feelings and beliefs in order to help wolves survive, and the "Trego Range

and fall as part of what became a long-term study of wolves in the remote forests of northeastern Minnesota. As increasing numbers of people become residents or vacationers in the area, their presence is changing not only the landscape, but also people's awareness of foot-hold traps.

Foot-hold traps are indiscriminate; they can capture dogs as well as wolves. In response to the public's concerns about these traps, noninvasive research practices are now the industry's standard best-practice, applied whenever possible. During winter 2019, Dr. Shannon Barber-Meyer

began testing non-invasive survey methods that do not include live trapping of wolves and may have less impact on people and their pets. Noninvasive survey methods include snow-tracking, camera trapping, scat and other genetic surveys, as well as citizen science networks to census wolves.

This summer she is testing a remote acoustic monitoring process, as well. A critical aspect of being a wolf biologist is adapting to the times, in terms of both changing landscapes and changing ethics.

The four biologists featured in this article have contributed to our knowledge of wolves as they work to protect wild wolf populations through learning about them and by mediating wolf-human conflict. *International Wolf* asked what advice they would offer to young people interested in pursuing a career in wildlife biology. Their responses showed remarkable agreement:

- Follow your passion!
- Be a naturalist—know about the environment where your species lives; get to know what is normal, so you can see what is *not* normal. Understand the ecosystem and the role your species plays in it. This can be accomplished only by being in the field.
- Study and achieve academic excellence, but not just in biology. Don't neglect mathematics—especially statistics, which is an essential part of research.

- Read everything you can find by researchers. Wildlife biologists are experts across many fields. Read beyond biology! Stay informed about local and national policies, the economics of farming and ranching, and the diseases that affect your species.
- Learn to communicate! Communication takes many forms (presentations, research papers, books, one-on-one conversations and more.) and involves people from a range of backgrounds (scientists, researchers, colleagues, government agents and officials, stakeholders, students and the public). You need to be able to share your results, explain the relevancy of your work and advocate for your species.
- Build your network by making connections with researchers, mentors and others in your field of interest.
- Gain hands-on experience in the field. Shadow a professional or volunteer at a nature park or a wildlife rehabilitation center, or any place that gives you the opportunity to work with animals.
- Make career decisions based on a strategy. Consider where your various choices will take you, and make sure the choice supports your goals. Stay focused.
- Never be afraid of hard work.
- Have perseverance and patience, even in the face of setbacks. Sometimes you have to keep trying until the right moment comes. Be gentle with yourself when you hit a rough patch. If this is your dream, don't give up—and remember to have fun along the way! ■

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Debra Mitts-Smith is a School of Information Sciences faculty member at the University of Illinois. Her research and teaching focus on visual culture, children's literature, history of the book and storytelling. Her book, *Picturing the Wolf in Children's Literature*, was published by Routledge in 2010. She is currently working on a cultural history of the wolf.

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**Shannon Barber-Meyer**

Rider Project" in northwestern Montana does just that. It brings together various stakeholders, including six ranching families, state and federal wildlife agencies, and conservation groups. This initiative revives a traditional way of protecting herds and flocks from depredation—riders on horseback guarding free-grazing livestock. Boyd notes that the rider's task is more than just deterring wolves from attacking livestock. Efforts to build and maintain relationships with ranchers are essential, Boyd explains. "Having someone like Range Rider Charlie Lytle out there in areas of chronic wolf depredation is crucial. He is charismatic and amicable—important qualities when dealing with the different and often conflicting values, concerns and attitudes of people in Montana."

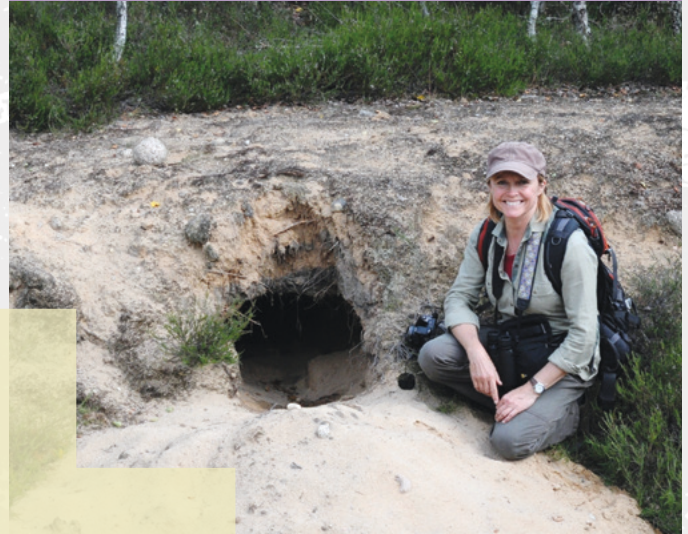
While livestock predation remains a serious issue, it is not the only potential point of conflict between wolves and people. Even the technology and research methods wolf biologists use to gather information can be controversial. Trapping wolves for radio-collaring is one strategy that is being questioned. In the 1960s, wolf biologists began live-trapping wolves for radio-collaring each summer

Dr. Shannon Barber-Meyer is a research wildlife biologist with the U.S. Geological Survey in Minnesota's Superior National Forest (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/superior/>).



Courtesy of Shannon Barber-Meyer

Dr. Sabina Nowak is a wolf researcher in the Polish Carpathian Mountains, and the founder and president of the Association for Nature WOLF (<http://www.polishwolf.org.pl/>).



Robert Mystajek



Chad Richardson

Dr. Diane Boyd serves as wolf management specialist for Region 1 of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, overseeing 11,280 square miles in the northwest sector of Montana. (<http://fwp.mt.gov/regions/r1/>)



Courtesy of Yolanda Cortés

Dr. Yolanda Cortés works for the World Wildlife Federation Spain on LIFE Euro Large Carnivores (<https://www.eurolargecarnivores.eu/en/>) and LIFE Southern Wolves to help make the presence of wolves more acceptable to local populations. (<https://lifelobo.es/en/>)

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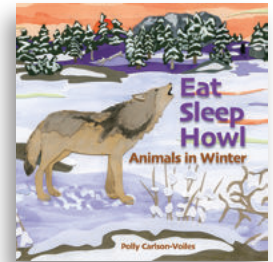
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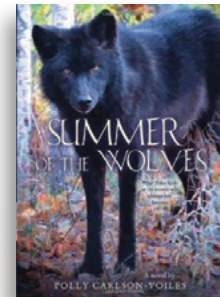
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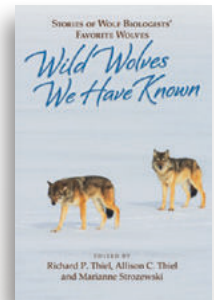


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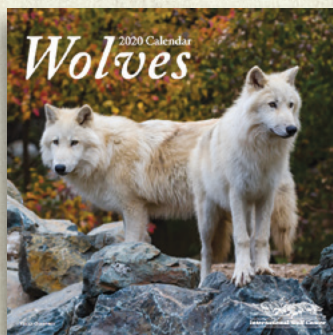
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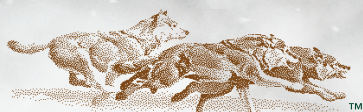
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