

Attitudes towards the return of grey wolves (Canis lupus) in Belgium

The wolves came back

As in other European countries, grey wolves came back to Belgium. Their presence kindles public discussions. We examined whether Flemish respondents traits were linked to their opinions and attitudes about wolves and to a popular rumour that the wolves have been artificially reintroduced by man.

Material and methods

- 1092 respondents : equal solicitation effort went to nature and hunting-related organizations.
- Multinomial logistic regression: are the respondent traits linked to his/her opinion on the mode of reentry of the wolves?
- Questions: opinion on reentry of wolves in Belgium
- Explanatory variables: age, sex, urban or rural living, level of education, owning pets or livestock, exposure to hunting activities, participation at hunting activities, time spent in nature, being solicited to participate at the questionnaire through a nature organization, hunting organization or any other way.

Results

Respondents profile:

- 70% was female, 30% male
- 68% was between 30 & 59 years old, 32% had other ages
- 74% closely followed the news regarding wolves, 26% did not
- 36,7% participated at hunting activities, 63,3% did not hunt
- 13% was informed about the questionnaire by a hunting organization, 22% by a nature organization, 66% by other ways.

How did the wolves come back?

- 53% : they came spontaneously
- 38% : they were reintroduced by man
- 9% : I do not know

Multinomial logistic model:

All factors except for age and degree of exposure to hunting significantly influenced the opinion on spontaneous or artificial reentry.

"I think the wolf came spontaneously"

Explanatory factors:

female gender, urban-living, higher education level, not owning dogs, owning cats, not owning livestock, not actively participating at hunting, spending little time in nature, being asked by a nature organization to participate at the questionnaire

90% of the people who thought the wolf came **spontaneously** had a **positive** attitude towards the wolf reentry

"I think the wolf was released"

Explanatory factors:

male gender, living outside cities, lower education level, owning a dog, not owning a cat, owning livestock, actively participating at hunting, spending much time in nature, being asked by a hunting organization to participate at the questionnaire

91% of the people who thought the wolf was **reintroduced** by man had a **negative** attitude towards the wolf arrival

Conclusions

Positive or negative attitudes towards the wolf, as well as opinions on its' spontaneous or artificial re-entry, are intertwined and relate to individual demographic and sociological factors. Most (but not all) of these explanatory factors confirm other studies.

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