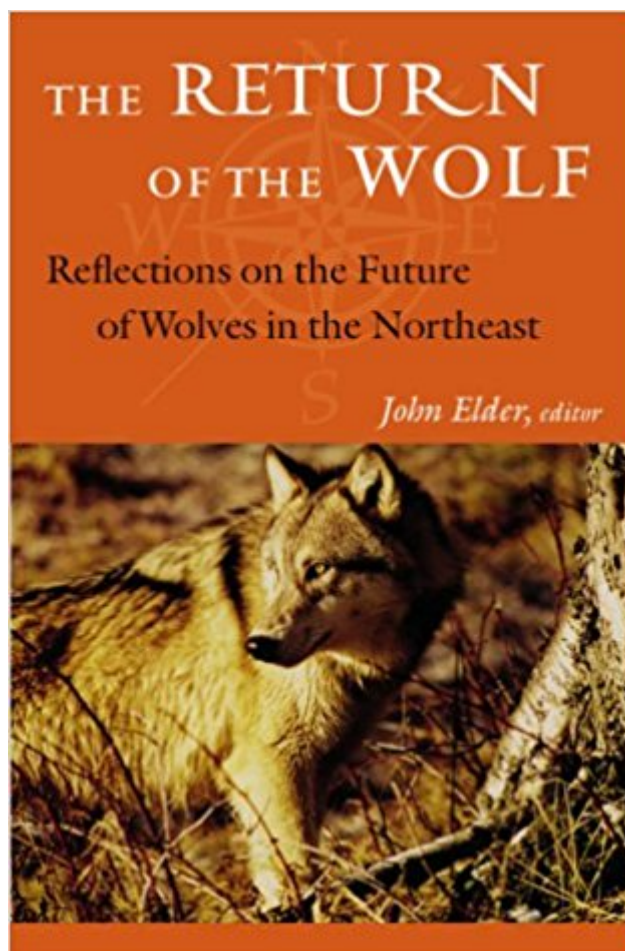




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# The Return Of The Wolf: Reflections On The Future Of Wolves In The Northeast (Middlebury Bicentennial Series In Environmental Studies)



## Synopsis

Long after their eradication from almost all parts of the US, wolves still evoke a primal response, firing the imagination with admiration, awe, and dread. Efforts to restore them to Yellowstone, North Carolina, and elsewhere have provoked heated public debate and met with only mixed success. Scientists and policymakers are debating the merits of returning the wolf to the northeastern US, where the forests of northern New England and upstate New York may provide the range and resources necessary to support them. This book brings together four thoughtful and literate observers of the natural world to reflect on the implications and potential of such an effort. Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*, encourages a skeptical look at our own motivations in this restorative effort, even as he argues that the psychological and spiritual benefits to humans would be at least as great as the ecological benefits of restoration. John Theberge, a scientist with years of experience in tracking the Canadian wolf population, notes that issues of restoration and -return- are far more complex from a biological and ecological point of view than much of the debate would suggest. Kristin DeBoer, director of the wolf restoration project of the environmental group RESTORE: The North Woods, reviews the state of the political debates, while also offering a personal account of her own motivations and goals in this work. Finally, novelist and nature writer Rick Bass brings the experiences of his home state of Montana to bear on the debate in the northeast.

## Book Information

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Wild timber wolves were famously reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park in 1995, as well as to Central Idaho. Much less visibly, wolves continue to thrive in northern Minnesota, Michigan's Upper Peninsula, and parts of Wisconsin. Even so, the species covers only a very small portion of its original range. Given the support of many Eastern environmentalists for wolf reintroduction out West, and the fact that Midwestern farmers do not object to wolves the way that Western ranchers do, the next natural move would be to reintroduce wolves to sparsely-populated areas in New England. Indeed, there is scattered evidence that they have already made their way there, braving the shipping channel of the St. Lawrence Seaway and the densely populated farm regions of southern Quebec. This book consists of four relatively unconnected essays on the topic of reintroducing wolves to the Northeast. The editor clearly gave each author the freedom to write his or her own essay, rather than divvying up topics more systematically. The resulting book is disunified, but the strengths of three of the four essays make up for this weakness. The first essay, by Bill McKibben, questions the shallow consumerism of North Americans and the role of wolves in that consumerism. He argued that we should not see them in terms of our "need" to "consume" wolves, but must instead learn to let them be for themselves. The second essay, by wolf researcher John Theberge, provides an ecological perspective on the topic. He emphasizes two issues: wolf-human interactions (humans are the leading cause of wolf mortality) and wolf-coyote hybridization. Both have been familiar topics in his own research, concentrated on the wolves of Algonquin Provincial Park at the edge of Canada's boreal forest. The third essay by Kristin DeBoer was the least successful in my mind. It's the most "poetic" of the four, using a style that doesn't call to me personally. Finally, "Vermont as Montana" by writer Rick Bass. He begins by imagining Vermont becoming like Montana, a place where wolves live. But then he reflects on the hostility of Montana to wolves, and the conservation ethic of many in Vermont, and imagines Montana becoming more like Vermont. As a transplant from the South to Montana's Yaak Valley, Bass certainly knows the Montanan perspective well, but I was not convinced that he really understood

Vermont. If you are interested in wolves, and if you are interested in a more humanistic and literary perspective than the natural science and social science that dominates most books, you will find this book interesting. If you are not already interested in wolves, however, its lack of unity and mix of agendas may be puzzling to you. (In that case, see my wolf list for books better suited to your interest.)

The Return of the Wolf is an eye-opener as it gives four very distinct and honest evaluations of the possibility of our northeastern forest communities welcoming the timber wolf back to its native haunts. Let us not confuse the eastern coyote which has hybridized with the eastern wolf as the east's top canid predator.....The wolf, just as in Yellowstone and Minnesota is the true predator of the moose, Caribou Elk and Beaver. The coyote, even if hybridized with wolf genes is still not a large enough creature (maximum of 70 pounds whereas the true timber wolf can be 100-150 pounds) to bring down the northeast's growing moose population and hopefully one day a restored caribou herd. Let the voice of Rick Bass, Kristen DeBoer and Bill McKibben weigh heavy.....let us set aside the lands, educate the "Little Red Riding Hood" believers and politic effectively with the state house representatives who tend to buckle to the pressure of corporations who favor short term extraction versus long term sustainability. Give the wolves the chance to push the coyotes to their rightful "fringe" of the forest allowing the true timber wolf and restored (hopefully) Cougar to stand atop the food chain as top predators of the land. Our forests have returned after 400 years of being chopped and burned. Let us stop the shopping malls and second home developments from destroying our wonderful open lands. Let the land be restored to its glory and allow the current residents of the backwoods to continue their sustainable forestry and woodcraft business while reaping some benefits from a controlled and managed Ecotourism. What a great thing for us to have the means and will to return and restore our woodlands in the most populated part of the U.S. to their former majesty. We can be a model for the conservative western United States and the emerging 3rd world countries to emulate.....The Return of the Wolf speaks of all of these things and more.....Fantastic writing! Rivals Charles Little's storytelling in the "Dying of the trees". Please pass on to a friend.....Let the restoration of the north woods begin!

I believe this is a cause for restoration. This book made me believe that the wolf should be released into the Adirondack mountains. It also had me believing that the ecosystem needs the wolves to survive. I was especially fascinated by Kristen DeBoer's idea of creating corridors between parks in Canada and the northeast, to help create migration routes for animals. I believe the book itself as well

was an informative, great, entertaining read.

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