

Project Coyote

and Compassionate Conservation and Coexistence

BY MARY HOLMES | WOLF PHOTO ©GETTY IMAGES

This issue, as you may have noticed, focuses on apex predators in the United States, particularly wolves. Because of the subject matter we knew we had to interview Camilla Fox of Project Coyote to get her input on the current situation. Don't let the name of the organization fool you. Project Coyote, founded by Camilla Fox in 2008, is an advocate for all apex predators, not just the coyote. In recent months they have increased their efforts on behalf of the wolves, because they are facing more opponents than usual at this time. The gray wolf, in the 48 contiguous states, had been on the Endangered Species List since 1978. In October of 2020, the Department of Interior announced that the population had recovered to the extent it was going to be delisted as of January 2021, one of the Trump Administration's many attacks on wildlife, conservation, and ecology. According to a Department of Interior press release, dated October 29, 2020:

The Service based its final determination solely on the best scientific and commercial data available, a thorough analysis of threats and how they have been alleviated and the ongoing commitment and proven track record of states and tribes to continue managing for healthy wolf populations once delisted. This analysis includes the latest information about the wolf's current and historical distribution in the contiguous United States.

Today's action reflects the Trump Administration's continued commitment to species conservation based on the parameters of the law and the best scientific and commercial data available," said Secretary Bernhardt. "After more than 45 years as a listed species, the gray wolf has exceeded all conservation goals for recovery. Today's announcement simply reflects the determination that this species is neither a threatened nor endangered species based on the specific factors Congress has laid out in the law."





Black wolves are rare, and found almost exclusively in North America. Since wolves all around the world shared a recent common ancestor, the fact that black wolves are mostly limited to North America suggests that gene variant causing the black coat color was only recently introduced among the wolf population. Photo ©Camilla Fox/Project Coyote.org

Many scientists disagree with this assertion; most evidence suggests the wolves are still in recovery status. Project Coyote, along with many other conservation organizations and concerned scientists, is involved in a concerted effort to have the species relisted.

According to their website, "Project Coyote is a national non-profit organization based in Northern California whose mission is to promote compassionate conservation and coexistence between people and wildlife through education, science and advocacy. Our representatives, advisory board members and supporters include scientists, conservationists, educators, ranchers, and citizen leaders who work together to change laws and policies to protect native carnivores from abuse and mismanagement, advocating coexistence instead of killing. We seek to change negative attitudes toward coyotes, wolves and other misunderstood predators by replacing ignorance and fear with understanding, respect and appreciation."

The organization currently has six major programs in effect to help reach these goals.

Carnivore Conservation & Coexistence

Fox states, "This program was actually renamed this year. It was previously Reforming Predator Management and we renamed it primarily because we wanted to get away from the idea and concept that we need to manage predators. Our mission as an organization is to promote coexistence between people and wildlife through education, science, and advocacy.

We felt that the Carnivore Conservation & Coexistence program title better fit what we're really trying to accomplish. I will also say that the program still entails shifting predator management, which has historically been focused on indiscriminate, lethal tools, whether those tools are employed by the federal USDA Wildlife Services program, or by private ranchers and farmers, but the overall concept is to raise awareness about the importance of apex predators in North America, to promote their protection, and to foster peaceful coexistence with them." The End Wildlife Killing Contests and Protect America's Wolves campaigns are part of this program. Eight states have banned wildlife killing contests to date; Fox was hoping that Nevada would become the ninth, but sadly, the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners voted 5-4 against the ban shortly after our interview.

Ranching with Wildlife

Regarding this program, Fox stated, "The Ranching With Wildlife program is very tied into some of the campaigns I just mentioned, particularly the campaign to reform Wildlife Services because part of our belief, as an organization, is that while we are working to end the most egregious ways that we mismanage wild carnivores, we also want to provide humane, effective, ecologically sound solutions to promote coexistence both in urban and rural areas. The Ranching With Wildlife program is about that very same goal of promoting humane and non-lethal methods for ranchers and farmers. We have various initiatives

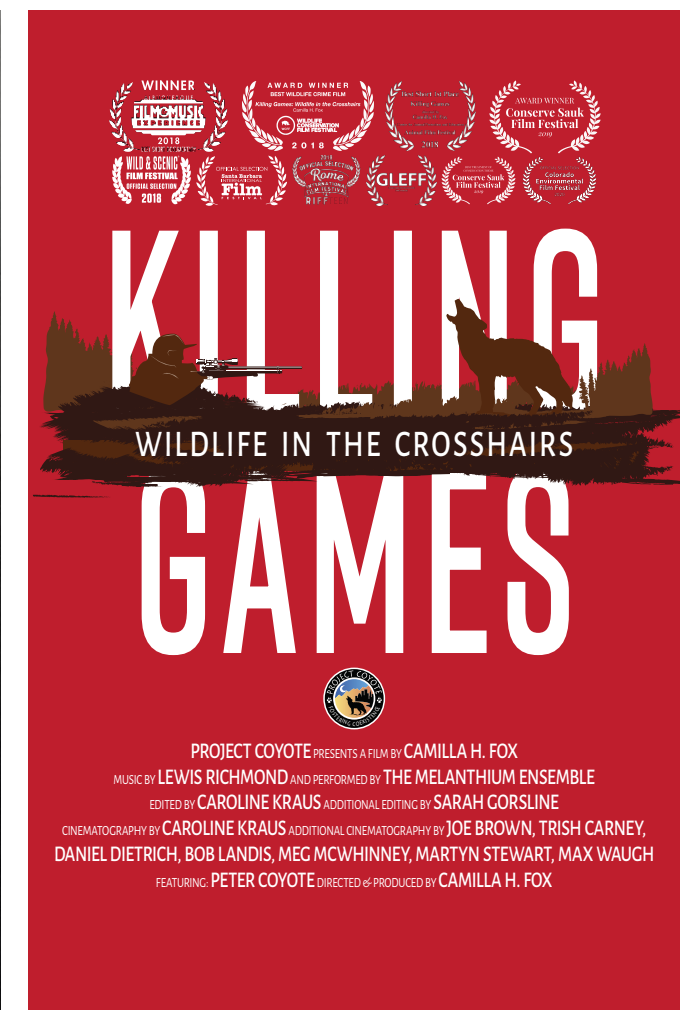


In 2018 Project Coyote released its documentary **KILLING GAMES — Wildlife In the Crosshairs** (produced and directed by Project Coyote Founder & Executive Director Camilla Fox). The film has since been screened across the globe and has garnered multiple awards raising awareness and inspiring action to ban wildlife killing contests (now banned in 8 states). In 2021 a new film produced by National Geographic filmmakers in partnership with Project Coyote titled **WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS** — was released and can be viewed at ProjectCoyote.org.

underway across the US under this program. There's a huge need for it, particularly because Wildlife Services emphasizes lethal and often indiscriminate control. They really don't provide the non-lethal tools, or the proper training in their use."

Coyote Friendly Communities™

Next, Fox spoke about the **Coyote Friendly Communities** program. "That is our solution-oriented program to help more urban and suburban communities peacefully and safely coexist with coyotes, and other wildlife. For example, if they adopt elements of our program, which includes signage, public education and outreach, PSAs, adoption of proactive coyote coexistence plans, and ordinances against wildlife feeding, they're really adopting tools and resources to enable the community to co-exist peacefully with all of their urban wild neighbors. These solution-oriented programs emanated



from a recognition that our state and federal wildlife agencies really don't provide a lot of concrete assistance to communities seeking tools and information promoting coexistence, be they rural or urban, because our state agencies are so focused on catering to hunters, trappers and other 'consumptive wildlife users.' As an organization we fill that void."

Science & Stewardship

"Good science is critical to effective wildlife advocacy. I started the organization was several of my graduate school committee members. Dr. Adrian Treves, the late Dr. Michael Soulé, Dave Parsons, all served on my thesis committee and they were all founding Science Advisory Board members and have been part of the organization ever since. They help in public comments and actions regarding endangered species, including our recently launched Protect America's Wolves campaign—all



TOP Camilla Fox and Mokie
Photo © Camilla H. Fox/ ProjectCoyote.org

LEFT Camilla Fox of Project Coyote and Jessica Blome of Greenfire Law celebrate on October 27 in Denver Colorado at the Animal Grantmakers conference after just learning that Dane County Wisconsin Judge Jacob Frost had just issued an injunction essentially stopping the proposed fall wolf hunt originally scheduled to start on November 6th. Blome is representing Project Coyote and allied organizations in the suit that has likely saved hundreds of wolves in Wisconsin. Photo © Ashley Fetters

of which falls under our Science & Stewardship program,” Fox continued.

Keeping it Wild – Youth Education and Outreach

Fox talked about the growth of this program. “**Keeping it Wild** is our youth education and outreach program. We have grown that program this year with a new coordinator, Sarah Killingsworth. We’re super excited about it. We believe that youth voices in conservation and advocacy are so critical. They will inherit this Earth— and we must nurture compassion and empathy for all beings while encouraging them to lift their voices in support of planetary stewardship. We want to elevate their voices through channels, such as state wildlife agency commission hearings. We’ve encouraged many school groups to testify, to submit letters, to get actively engaged in wildlife advocacy. It really is the young people and the volunteers, the people who give their time and talents selflessly to our mission that keeps me going and inspires me to continue this sometimes soul-sapping work.

Artists for Wild Nature

Fox concluded with, “Our **Artists for Wild Nature program** is

really about bringing the voices of artists into our work where we can showcase their works in support of wild nature – while they help elevate our mission by reaching a variety of audiences that we don’t normally reach. We work with wildlife photographers, sculptors, painters, film makers and writers to foster awareness and appreciation of the wild. For example, we have a student that we’ve been working with in Michigan who brought together some of our participating artists and put together a traveling exhibit focused on the plight of wolves, both at the state and federal level, why they’re important, and highlighting their exquisite beauty. That kind of outreach can be incredibly powerful.”

Fox circled back to our original reason for the interview – wolves. She explained, “I think one of the misunderstandings about Project Coyote, because of our name, is that we exclusively focus on coyotes. We work on behalf of many other species, and particularly the most maligned, misunderstood, persecuted wild carnivores of North America, so that includes wolves, bears, mountain lions, and bobcats (in addition to coyotes). These are species that generally have no protections and can often be killed, 24/7, with unimaginable methods. Wolves unfortunately

fall into that category in several states where they are trophy hunted and trapped since federal protections were removed.

“When I mentioned our founding in 2008 and some of the renowned scientists who comprise our Science Advisory Board, many of them were already ensconced in wolf restoration and protection campaigns. For example, David Parsons has been deeply involved in Mexican wolf recovery since the early 1990s when he oversaw the Mexican wolf recovery program for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Watch our message from Dave Parsons about wolves [here](#). Dr. Adrian Treves, Dr. Paul Paquet, and Dr. John Vucetich, all of whom serve on our Science Advisory Board, are all deeply involved in wolf conservation and considered internationally recognized authorities on mammalian carnivores. So, it’s a natural area for us to expand upon. The Trump Administration removed protections for wolves in January of 2021. Since then, we have launched our **Protect America’s Wolves campaign** that first and foremost calls for **relisting of wolves under the Endangered Species Act and the creation of a national wolf recovery plan**. That’s the overarching goal within that campaign. We are working to counter statewide efforts to increase slaughter of wolves, including Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Wisconsin.”

She said they had success recently in Wisconsin, where they got a temporary injunction to halt the fall wolf hunt there. February of 2021 was a different story. Fox stated, “In February of 2021, Wisconsin allowed a wolf hunt. A group called Hunter Nation sued the state and essentially used a bill enacted in 2012 – that requires the state to allow wolf hunting if federal protections are removed. The state then allowed for a hunt in February that led to the slaughter of at least 218 wolves within a 60-hour period—exceeding the set quota by 83%. In February, of course, we had pregnant wolves.” Project Coyote is still going through channels to determine the full impact of that hunt on the wolf population but one of their Wisconsin-based Science Advisory Board Members, Dr. Adrian Treves estimates that the February wolf hunt alone likely decimated the state’s wolf population by more than a third.

Asked how our readers could help Project Coyote in its efforts, she responded, “I would say go to our website, join our E-Team to stay apprised of our work for wildlife and get involved. We have two active petitions on our homepage: one to ban killing contests on federal public lands and a second to relist wolves under the Endangered Species Act. Sign those - and if you’re inspired by our work please [join Project Coyote!](#) We are a small non-profit and depend on the support of individual donors to keep doing this important work for the wild ones.”

This year has witnessed their biggest expansion yet. Project Coyote is currently moving into the Midwest with a collaborative **Big River Connectivity program focusing on rewilding the Mississippi watershed region**, and plans further expansion into the Southeast and Southwest regions of the United States if funding can be secured. Project Coyote, with its reliance on science, and its ever-expanding collaborations with like-minded individuals and organizations, continues to make this a better environment for *all* species.

For more information on Project Coyote, and the wolves, visit: projectcoyote.org/



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