
Media coverage of the wolf recovery in France: how newspapers' social-ecological values impact conflict mitigation

Marie Chandelier^{*1,2}, Raphaël Mathevet³, and Agnès Steuckardt²

¹Centre d'Ecologie Fonctionnelle et Evolutive (CEFE) – Campus CNRS, UMR 5175 – 1919 route de Mende;34293;Montpellier Cedex 5, France

²PRAXILING UMR5267 (Praxiling) – CNRS : UMR5267, Université Paul Valéry - Montpellier III – Université Paul-Valéry - 17, rue Abbé de l'Épée - 34090 Montpellier, France

³Centre d'écologie fonctionnelle et évolutive (CEFE) – Université Paul Valéry - Montpellier III, Université Montpellier I, Université Montpellier II - Sciences et Techniques du Languedoc, CIRAD : UMR101, CNRS : UMR5175, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Montpellier SupAgro – CEFE 1919 Route de Mende 34293 MONTPELLIER CEDEX 5, France

Abstract

The return of large carnivores in Europe has increasingly led to environmental conflicts, mainly due to their impact on breeding activities. By extensively covering stakeholders' debates, mass media have shaped a specific representation of human-wildlife conflicts, and have thus contributed to influence public perception of predator recovery issues. In this communication, we focus on the media coverage of the wolf return and management in France. Using a linguistic approach based on lexical and syntactic discourse analysis, we compared the evolution of the wolf conflict treatment in a French national (*Le Monde*, n=338) and regional (*Nice-Matin*, n=942) newspaper, from 1992 to 2014. As generalist newspapers have to maintain a large readership, they are likely to build a less sliced conflict representation than involved stakeholders. However, we observed that social-ecological views of both newspapers had an impact on the properties attributed to human and non human stakeholders. Along the period, *Nice-Matin* emphasized an empathetic description of livestock breeders' experience of the wolf, and tended to exclude the predator from a well balanced social-ecological system. Before the establishment of quotas allowing wolf removal (2004), *Le Monde* expressed its support for the wolf conservation essentially by associating deceitful attitudes to livestock breeders, and rational properties to institutional officials. The establishment of wolf removal policy was associated with a progressive rehabilitation of breeders and a focus on the emotional aspects of predation. Properties of violence and intentionality were then attributed to the wolf. Our study shows that in each newspaper, media coverage of the conflict induced the exclusion of either the wolf or the breeder from a well balanced social-ecological system. We finally discuss the critical impact of printed press' unbalanced treatment of human-wildlife issues. Instead of contributing to mitigate the conflict, media coverage emphasizes the representation of polarized positions in the public debate.

*Speaker