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Author

Johnson, William T.

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Review: The Return of the Mexican Gray Wolf Back to the Blue

By Bobbie Holaday

Review by [William T. Johnson](#)

Scottsdale Public Library, Palomino Branch, Scottsdale, Arizona, USA

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Bobbie Holaday. *The Return of the Mexican Gray Wolf Back to the Blue*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003. 220 pp. ISBN 0-8165-2295-2 (cloth); 0-8165-2296-0 (paper). US\$45.00 cloth; US\$18.95 paper.

Can one person make a difference? Bobbie Holaday demonstrated that, in spite of local resistance, media misinformation, bureaucratic ineptitude, strong emotions, weak scholarship by one notable researcher, and inadequate funding at all levels, she could still save an endangered species. Newly retired, Holaday took grass roots action and formed an advocacy group called PAWS (Preserve Arizona's Wolves) in 1987. From there she entered a whirlwind of controversy with environmentalists pitted against ranchers, local citizens against federal officials, and friends against neighbors, with each side of the reintroduction issue claiming that God was in their corner.

Written chronologically, the reader is able to follow developments as they unfold. Holaday does an excellent job of introducing the varied personalities involved with objective clarity. She faithfully presents both sides of specific issues, supplying all the necessary details without watering down the passion expressed. Opposition and advocates alike speak for themselves. In so doing, they either hang themselves or vindicate their position.

Her primary strategy in seeing the Mexican Gray Wolf reintroduced into the Southwest was to correct the massive amount of misinformation circulating about wolves and their interactions with people. She launched a massive educational campaign based on solid scholarship from the best wolf authorities in America. She partnered with the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum to promote an accurate program for use in schools. This program circulated widely throughout Arizona during the 1990s.

Her secondary strategy was to simply persevere. She totally embodied the phrase, "when the going gets tough, the tough get going." She and her group PAWS patiently endured the political wrangling, myths, and personal insults aimed at them by the opposition. She sought to establish a dialogue of trust in a forum that was open and objective. Once wolves had actually been released into Arizona's Blue Range, her goal had been accomplished and PAWS was disbanded.

Interwoven throughout Holaday's account, the reader will find a number of interesting sidelights, such as the impact of poor scholarship by one researcher on the reintroduction process, the role of the Defenders of Wildlife compensation fund for predation upon domestic stock, and one case of subverting the Endangered Species Act with the help of Safari Club International. However, among the most interesting aspects of Holaday's story is to see how each side of the issue used God to justify their position, opposite though they were.

Justifying the value of wolves, Holaday stated, "God did not create a single unnecessary species and although God gave humanity the responsibility of stewardship over all other living things, God did not give us the right to slash, burn, and slaughter." She quotes Diane Sylvain (1997, p. 14) who questioned some people's claims to love God while their actions demonstrated a clear hatred of wolves. "How can one love Creator and not the creation? Nature is called good by the One who makes it—all of it, even the parts we don't understand or find pretty or make use of, that get in our way and sometimes frighten us with their teeth" (p. 65).

Bruce Babbitt, then Secretary of the Interior, stated, "These wolves, if they are managed properly, can be pretty good neighbors. There is room enough and space enough in God's creation that we can all live in harmony on this landscape" (p. 123). David "Dink" Robarts, on the other hand, organized a protest in Alpine. The *Denver Post* records him as saying, "We believe they [wolves] are a ploy to limit our access to public lands. Wolf lovers worship the created, not the Creator. ... We believe the wolf was created by God and wasn't intended to be set aside and worshiped in a pagan manner. They hold wolves in higher esteem than their fellow man" (p. 127). The protestors claimed they were the endangered species, not the wolves. Holaday stated, the day wolves were released, "God's in His heaven; all's right with the world" (p. 128). Wolf haters, on the other hand must have thought He was on vacation.

Whatever your spiritual inclination, you'll find this story suspenseful, passionate, and well written. Hats off to a great story by a great lady—well done. It is recommended for public and academic libraries, wildlife enthusiasts, environmentalists, and outdoor recreationists, across the Southwest and beyond. The text includes a number of helpful maps, photographs, and an excellent index.

Reference

Sylvain, Diane. (1997, April). Coyote Vigil. *High Country News*, 17.

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William Ted Johnson <TJohnson@ci.scottsdale.az.us>, Senior Coordinator,
Scottsdale Public Library - Palomino Branch, 12575 E. Via Linda Suite 102,
Scottsdale, AZ 85259-4310 USA. TEL: 1-480-312-6110. Fax: 1-480-312-
6120.