

Preface

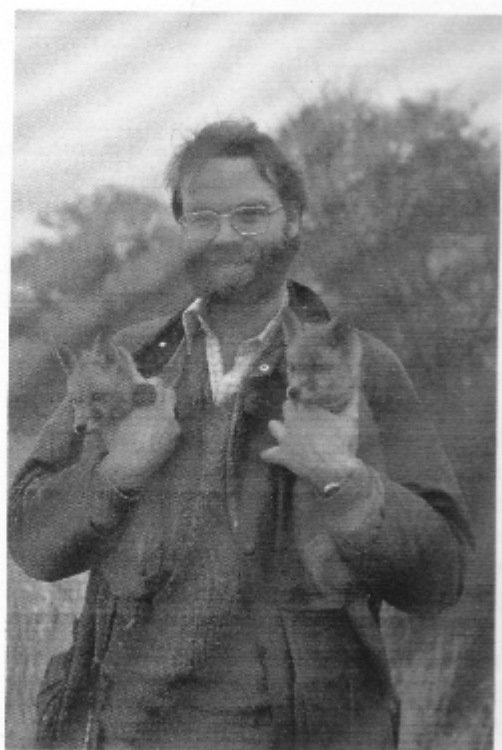
Although it is positioned at the start, the Preface is—at least in this book—the last section to be written, and therefore this seems an appropriate place to take stock of the history, and the process, that has brought us to this point. On reflection, this book has had several different beginnings, of which the most immediate was the moment when we decided, in the late 1990s, that the year 2001 should be the one when we would draw together various major strands of our shared involvement with wild canids. We scheduled, for September of that year, the Canid Biology and Conservation Conference—held under the auspices of the IUCN/SSC Canid Specialist Group and hosted by Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU). The intention was that this conference would serve three different goals—first, it would be a stimulating meeting of the world's specialists in wild canids, second, it would be a forum for the brain-storming that was to initiate the final stages of our work to edit the Second Canid Action Plan (the first had been published by Ginsberg & Macdonald in 1990), and third, it was to stimulate what we intended to become the most compendious work yet published on wild canids, their biology and conservation—this book is the result of that third goal. As it happens, the conference, with its 240 delegates from 38 countries was also a marvellous celebration—not only of the wondrous biology of the canids, but of the dedication and skill of the marvellous people who study them. It also happened to fall for one of us not only on the 20th anniversary of Chairmanship of the Canid Specialist Group, but also on a fiftieth birthday—so it was quite a party!

The concept of this book grew from the belief that to understand any group of animals—and certainly the family Canidae—one needs to slice the cake from two angles. The first slice takes a broad view of diversity and trends; for this reason, half the book is devoted to reviews. Each review is by three authors, each of them from a different institution and often a different continent, and each trio encompassing unsurpassable expertise in its field. The second essential slice takes a deep view of detail and intricacy; and

that is why the other half of the book is devoted to case histories, some of which have continued over many years—and indeed thereby have outlived the miserable phase of biological fashion that deemed long-term field studies as no more than an excuse for 'more of the same'. Little did the advocates of that latter view appreciate that long-term data sets would emerge as amongst the richest veins sustaining modern ecology, as is amply demonstrated in the pages that follow.

In planning the book we obviously faced many considerations, and two deserve mention. First, after much discussion, we opted to omit chapters on domestic dogs. This decision was difficult, and might well have gone the other way; part of the reason was space—the wealth of material on wild canids already caused our text to grow replete until its covers (and the publishers) groaned, while to do justice to the fascination of domestic dogs could have expanded our scope by several chapters more. Anyway, our priority has been wild canids, and the science that underpins their conservation, which brings us to the second consideration, namely how this book relates to the Canid Action Plan, on which we have worked simultaneously (Sillero-Zubiri *et al.* in press). The answer is that while the two ventures have been separate, and have different motivations, there are synergies between them. First, in many cases the same experts have been involved. Second, while the Action Plan is intended to be a purely practical document, whereas this book is a scholarly one, our intention is that the science in this volume should underpin the practice advocated by the other. The two come together in our post script, Chapter 23.

Although the formal beginning of this trio of canid projects—the conference, the Action Plan and this book—was in the late 1990s, other roots run deeper. We are both members of the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, and the origins of that Unit lay in the work of a maverick band of canid researchers known in the late 1970s as the Oxford Foxlot. It is a particular pleasure to us to note how many of our colleagues from this kennel have



David with hand-reared red fox cubs, Claudio with anaesthetised Ethiopian wolf © J. Macdonald, D. Gottelli.

emerged as substantial figures on the canid scene—indeed of fifty authors in this book, 15 of them trained in the WildCRU (and 11 secured doctorates there). In one sense, then, the roots of this book are buried in the origins and efforts of the WildCRU, and we offer an enormous vote of thanks to all the members of our unit, past and present, who have contributed to understanding canid biology. Our own infatuations with canids have even deeper roots—for one of us boyhood observations of Pampas foxes from horseback in the Argentine pampas, for the other, an early attempt to write a book on foxes when 11 years old was a first step in the exacting task of finding a way to make a living out of this particular inexplicable fascination (Macdonald 1987, p. 13). Looking through our photo libraries for pictures to illustrate this volume we unearthed youthful pictures below of ourselves with our first loves, and remembered just how much we owed to them.

Clearly, a book of this size and scope represents a cooperative effort. The conspicuous members of the pack are the authors—and we thank them for their hard work and good humour. Behind the scenes, however, are the many members of the Canid Specialist Group (www.canids.org), and such tireless volunteers as Michelle Nelson and Emma Harvey who researched the photos, Jim Scarff who mans the website and Mike Hoffmann who worked tirelessly on the distribution maps and much else besides. We thank them all, as we do also Ruairidh Campbell and Kerry Kilshaw who tracked down endless proof queries, and our colleagues at Oxford University Press, Ian Sherman and Anita Petrie.

A general lesson from these pages is how the burgeoning knowledge of wild canids over the last twenty five years has advanced in pulses—each spurt forward the result of a new innovation that allowed data to catch up, at least a little, with

theory: night-vision scopes followed radio-collars, and were followed by molecular genetics. Now GPSs are upon us, miniaturisation advances apace and the price of molecular scatology tumbles—we are thus assured that new pulses of understanding will follow soon (at least, they will if minds full of

technology retain a grip on natural history and fieldcraft). We hope that this book will provide a foundation for the next wave of canid discoveries and, in the meantime, kindle the fires of understanding and delight on which the futures of these glorious creatures will depend.

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