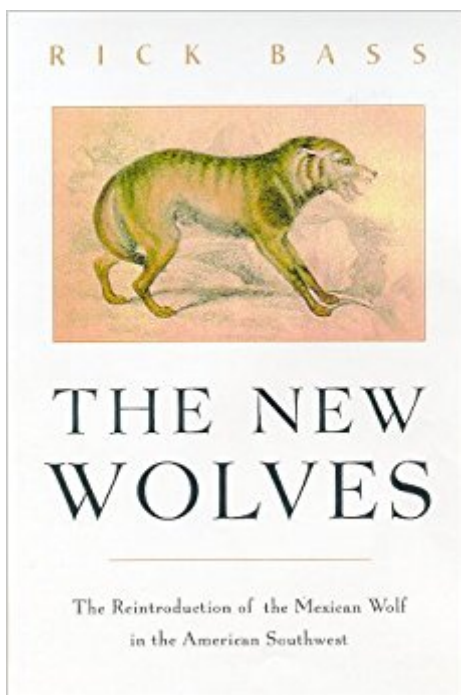


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# The New Wolves



## Synopsis

Lobos, or Mexican wolves, once roamed freely throughout Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas until they were hunted to extinction when big cattle interest came to the Southwest. Now, a Mexican wolf reintroduction -- similar to the Yellowstone efforts for its cousin the gray wolf -- is underway in the Blue Mountains of Arizona. But cattle have overgrazed the fragile land, damaging the ecosystem that barely sustains their vast numbers. Can this environment sustain wolves? With the literary talent and naturalist's sensibility he brought to his highly praised 1992 account of a family of wolves in Montana, *The Ninemile Wolves*, Rick Bass examines the circumstances of the Mexican wolves' arrival: the exhausted soil of the land, the behavior and requirements of wolves, and the concerns of ranchers and environmentalists. "The New Wolves" brings to life a place -- its people and its wildlife, its past and its future. Bass articulates the land's need for wolves to maintain balance, while masterfully depicting the modern conflict between nature and our need to control it. Part meditation, part probing journalism, "The New Wolves" is an important new chapter in the drama of wolves and the American West.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 128 pages

Publisher: The Lyons Press; 1st edition (October 1, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1558216979

ISBN-13: 978-1558216976

Product Dimensions: 8.6 x 5.8 x 0.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,053,636 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #121 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Dogs & Wolves #287 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Endangered Species #893 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Mammals

## Customer Reviews

Once again, Bass (*The Ninemile Wolves*) returns to the controversial theme of wolf reintroduction to weave a lyrical narrative along the boundaries of the nature essay, character portraiture and eco-philosophy. Relying on contemporary anecdotes and personal remembrances that are full of sentiment but never sentimental, Bass discusses the government's efforts to reestablish the

Mexican wolf population in three Southwestern states. His concern centers on the dramatic environmental changes that will greet this previously captive, zoo-bred remnant of the great wolf packs that roamed the territory for thousands of years. More than a century of overgrazing by cattle has changed the ecology to such an extent that Bass wonders if the species is adaptable enough to successfully regenerate in its former homelands. Bass, a staunch environmentalist, has sympathy for all the competing factions in this controversial equation. He doesn't deal in stereotypes. Ranchers, cowboys, Indians, hunters, survivalists, scientists, government agents and idealistic student activists are all treated with respect and understanding. The writer moves easily among the contending parties, with his keen eye on the land that holds and molds them all. He mines the layers of political, social, economic, cultural and ethical relevance with a unique poetic voice, and, in the end, it is the wolves who most vigorously capture his imagination and fascination. This is a ballad of a book, a hymn to the gloriously defiant power of survival that transcends the single issue that is its putative subject. Eight-page color insert, not seen by PW. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

As a Southwestern companion to Bass's 1992 treatise on the reintroduction of wolves in Montana (*The Ninemile Wolves*, LJ 5/15/92), *The New Wolves* examines the federally mandated attempt to reestablish the lobo, or endangered Mexican wolf, in Arizona. The project, generally buoyed by public support, faces local opposition from ranchers and hunters. Bass presents a brief history of wolf eradication programs in the Southwest, as well as a description of the volunteers, philanthropists, and various government agencies involved in the ongoing project. As an avowed environmentalist, he readily admits the difficult prospects facing the three packs of wolves but remains hopeful they can adapt and survive in a changed landscape. A good addition (also see James Burbank's *Vanishing Lobo*, Johnson Bks., 1990, o.p.) by a popular author for public libraries and environmental collections. (Illustrations not seen.) ATim J. Markus, Evergreen State Coll. Lib., Olympia, WA Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

My first Rick Bass reading. A perfect mesh of interests for me, since I am already very interested in the gray wolves in the Rockies, their fates intertwined with the various states, and their levels of recovery in different areas. Bass steps through the reintroduction of Mexican wolves (lobos), from the Endangered Species Act to those whom the wolves may affect (ranchers), to the volunteers and activists taking part in the reintroduction efforts. He lends an element of mysticism and spirit, even animism, to the land and to the wolves. This is woven throughout, not heavyhanded, just his

sentiments that the land itself desires what it once had, a complete ecosystem and food chain, natural wild predators. And that when the land and its environment and surroundings are complete, everything (and everyone) benefits. It is a healthy support system. The book references the studies related to reintroduction, and notes that a lot of guesswork has to go into it, since there was no real documented behaviors or studies of the lobos before we stripped them from the land. Bass's biases are obvious--but this book will mostly invite reads from those with a similar mindset. I recommend this. A fast read, a nice succinct view into real conservation efforts that are happening today, and that have science, government, and good people behind them.--- ---Some of my favorite quotes (of which there were many): "wolves will make it back to this land because the land desires it" (31) "I need wilderness, big wilderness, as an antidote to my sins--a place to say, Here I will finally devour nothing" (104) "if the land is sick, nothing on top of it can truly be vital or healthy" (73) "I wonder: are we having radicalism bred out of us? What does it say for us when the idea of having one hundred Mexican wolves free in the world again is deemed radical?" (91) "Everything writes sentences: rivers, streams, wind currents, elk herds, migrating geese, wolves. Everything has a voice. Some voices are merely less audible than others. We ignore them at our peril; in shunning the lessons of history we embrace ignorance, we fail to take advantage of guidelines for the future. Our stories, our lives, our cultures sag and fracture into gibberish and monosyllabic chants of \*More, more more\*. [...] we are running out of the thing that once sustained us: a certain spirit and imagination upon the land, and certain stories told to us by that land." (121) "There are no neat stories in nature, no tidy closures with beginning, middle, and end; no epiphanies. There is only ongoing process, continuous struggle." (158)

Yes , the Hills are moving with the Wolves again , and Rick Bass possess the finest ability to show "us" , that there's no map of the future ... "We" can only watch and listen , and hope to learn from the past , as well as from the present , that "we" did not learn the first time ... Yes , strongly recommended ...

Real patriots do more than wear a flag in the label. They truly care for that part of the earth that the flag represents, and are distressed by the abuse the land has taken. The last of the Mexican wolves (or lobos) in the Southwest were captured in the 1970's, and placed in zoos. Fear of wolves seems to be "hardwired" into human's DNA, no doubt from prehistoric times, when there were real clashes between the two species over food territories. This fear, even loathing, was captured by Willa Cather, another author who has written about the Southwest, in her classic book on the American

plains, "My Antonio." In this book three Russians who have immigrated to Nebraska are held in contempt because of the rumors that their past had included throwing the bride and groom off a sled traveling through the Russian steppe in winter - literally, "to the wolves," to slow down their pursuit. Furthermore, wolves in America do, from time to time, attack, and eat livestock - and thus there is much hostility from many ranchers to their existence. But solving the rancher's concerns by taking the wolf out of the eco-system lead to those famous "unintended consequences" which include overgrazing of the land by deer and elk, that were the natural prey of the wolf. Rick Bass has written an important book which tells the story of a few real patriots who have tried to re-introduce the wolf into its natural habitat. He describes the problem in the first chapter entitled "Drought." Some students and a few teachers became interested in making "amends" to nature by restoring some of the original eco-system, and one chapter covers the painstaking steps taken by this group to prepare wolves that had been raised in captivity to their new life "in the wild." By far though, most of the book details the human "strife" surrounding the new program, including support from the federal government, opposition from the ranchers, the provocative role of an eco-anarchist (Dave Foreman, founder of Earth First!), and the unlikely support of a billionaire who had made his money in the media, Ted Turner. The University of New Mexico football team is called the "lobos," so there remains much local interest in the project... pro and con, and there are the scattered articles in the paper, which even carry the perhaps true story of school children being threatened by wolves at the bus stop. Then again, it may simply be the hysteria from the "hardwired" loathing of wolves. Bass book is now 10 years old; in the interim the political winds have blown against those who believe that more funds should be spent on preserving our natural environment, including our National Parks. Though it might be discouraging, the book should be updated to cover this period. The political winds have again changed, and those interested in our environment and infrastructure are now ascendant. A recommended read.

I have long been an admirer and fan of Rick Bass' works. He is a nature writer that understands the importance of landscape and wild places and creatures to the human spirit and the necessity to have all the appropriate elements of a particular landscape to make it complete. The Mexican wolf has been gone from the American Southwest for 70 years and Bass argues that the reintroduction of these wolves into this area is one of rightness and inevitability, as the landscape wants and cries for the wolves to be here. The book is sprinkled with a varied cast of characters, from Ted Turner and an assortment of wildlife biologists, (the heros of this story,) ranchers, students, and many others. All points of view are thoughtfully considered and also the land and the wolves are described

in the haunting manner that only Rick Bass can fashion. A great book for anyone interested in wolves, ecology, biology, or just landscape and nature and our human connection to it. I would highly recommend this book.

Rick Bass' *New Wolves* (1-58574-265-1, \$14.95) charts the return of the Mexican Wolf to the American Southwest and the controversies surrounding its preservation. Political, social and natural history blend in essays which survey the wolves and provide first-person observations. A recommended pick for any who love animals and natural history.

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