

Wednesday, August 1st 2018

Dear Mustafa,

Last November I made a short visit to the Cevennes National Park in the south of France where we are undertaking some small building work. At that time a wild boar had kicked out the water pipes that linked our mountain water source to the house. While up the hill putting things back together in a 'Heath Robinson' fashion I found some unsettling evidence. Large paw prints in the river sand and a dismembered carcass of a wild boar left no doubt...wolves are here.

My neighbours confirmed that yes indeed wolves do now pass through the Cevennes on their way from northern Italy to their Pyrenean winter base in Spain.

On my return here a fortnight ago I asked the neighbours for an update. They smiled and said that the wolves had returned permanently; that they rather liked it here and had decided not to move on to Spain. However, they assured me, there was no wolf problem in our 'commune'....but in the next door one there certainly was. Well that 'commune' is a mere 5 miles away, and wolves can range 40 miles a day.

So in my book there are wolves in our forest, and the hills that have always held an air of gentle mystery now contain a more predatory presence.

This area of France is sheep and goat farming country; wolves had been systematically hunted to extinction here

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over 100 ago. The wolf today is a protected animal. So now there are a new generation of locals who have no experience how to co-exist alongside their new ferocious residents.

The wolves are back not only in the Cevennes but also in the woods of Washington and Westminster, and are stalking every political corridor of Europe. These wolves see a plentiful supply of corpulent boar to prey upon with the carcasses left behind to alarm and chill us.

We had become used to living with boars, they were mostly harmless. The wolves though are another matter, they categorically are not a romantic throwback of a bygone era. When they settle they alter and change the behaviour of the whole population; we should recognise their effect and not delude ourselves that the wolves are over some hill... that they are someone else's headache.

As I sip my morning tea, I now think twice about wandering in the forest. My hope is that the wolves move on once they have feasted enough, returning to their remote mountain lair.

See you next week - Chris