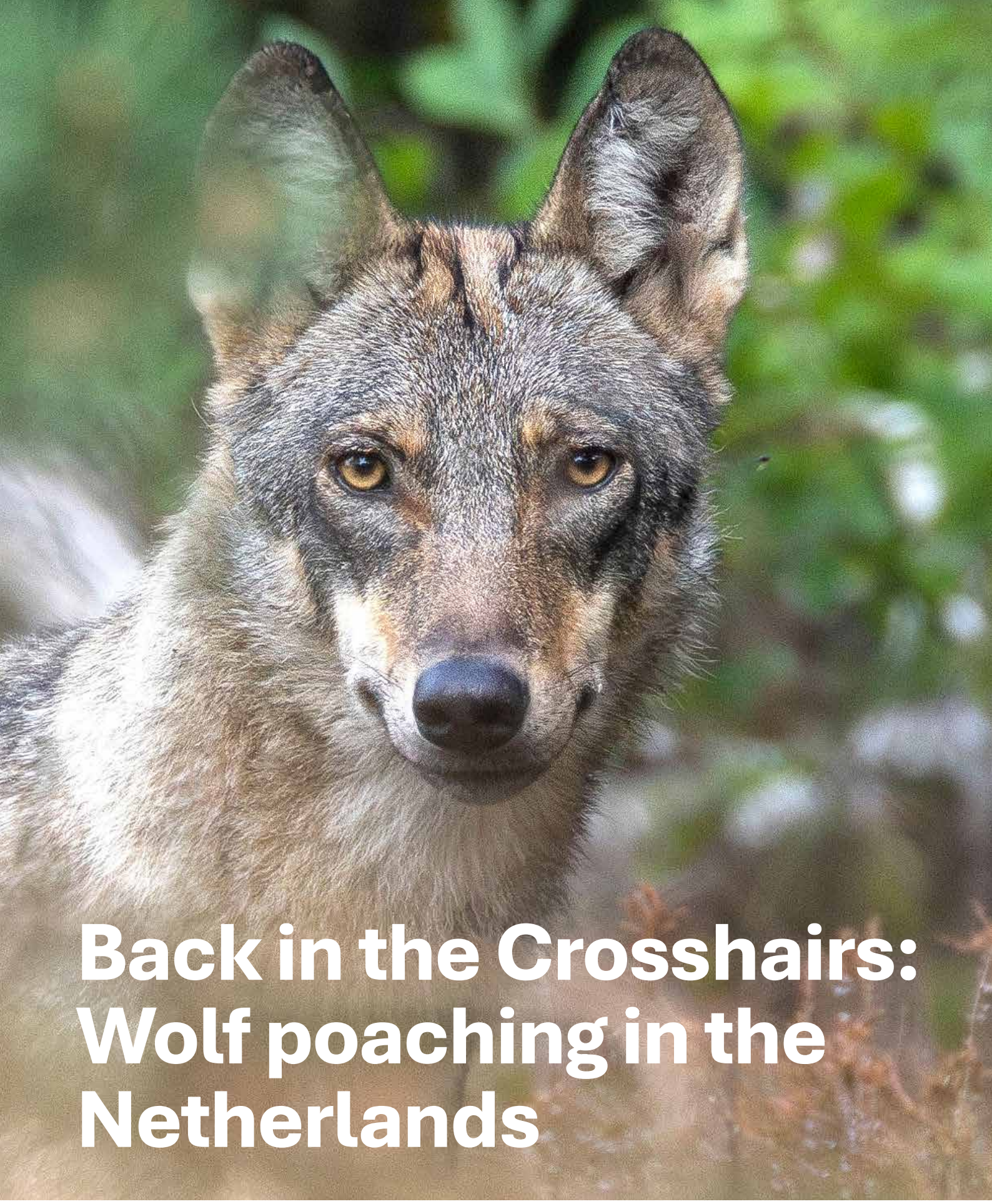

Back in the Crosshairs: Wolf poaching in the Netherlands

ECOJUST

Humane World for Animals

Photo: Arjen Heeres

Colophon

Back in the Crosshairs: Wolf poaching in the Netherlands

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Published by: EcoJust www.ecojust.eu

Date of publication: 23 June 2026

Suggested citation: Verheij, P.M. & Louchouarn, N.X. (2026). Back in the Crosshairs: Wolf poaching in the Netherlands. EcoJust, 23 June 2026.

Design and layout:

KUBE Art & Design
kube-artdesign.com

Photo credits: Unless otherwise indicated in captions, all photographs are the property of the authors or have been reproduced with permission.

Cover photo: Arjen Heeres

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to express their sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to this report.

First and foremost, we thank the 61 witnesses who agreed to be interviewed for this study. Many did so at personal risk, sharing sensitive information in the trust that it would be used responsibly and in the service of wolf conservation. This report would not have been possible without their courage and candour.

We are grateful to the team at Rhizome Insights, and in particular Allen Owen, Justine Brunning and Rueben Trigg, for their analytical support, including data visualisation and social media sentiment analysis.

We thank Dr Jo Swabe, Alexandra Kennaugh and Lucie Wuethrich for their thorough and constructive review of the manuscript, which significantly strengthened the final report.

We are grateful to Maurice Schalken for providing information and for his help in interpreting the wolf monitoring data.

We also extend our gratitude to Steven van der Bent, Ramon van Bentum, Arjen Heeres, Dirk Hoogenstein, Luc Hoogenstein, Erik de Jonge, Marcel van Kammen and Tirza Verwijs for generously providing photographs for use in this report.

Our thanks go to Caroline Kube of KUBE Art & Design for the design and layout of this report.

Finally, we gratefully acknowledge Humane World for Animals for funding this study and for their commitment to wolf conservation in the Netherlands and beyond.

Contents

List of abbreviations

BBB	BoerBurgerBeweging (Farmer Citizen Movement)
BOA	Buitengewoon Opsporingsambtenaar (Special Investigations Officer)
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
EU	European Union
DWHC	Dutch Wildlife Health Centre
FVD	Forum voor Democratie (Forum for Democracy)
GPS	Global Positioning System
GW	Grey Wolf (individual wolf identifier used in Dutch monitoring)
IPO	Interprovinciaal Overleg (Association of Provinces of the Netherlands)
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KNJV	Koninklijke Nederlandse Jagersvereniging (Royal Dutch Hunters Association)
LCIE	Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe
LVVN	Ministerie van Landbouw, Visserij, Voedselzekerheid en Natuur (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature)
n.d.	No date
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OM	Openbaar Ministerie (Public Prosecution Service)
OSINT	Open Source Intelligence
PBL	Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving (Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency)
PCP	Pre-charged Pneumatic (type of air rifle)
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom)
RDA	Raad voor Dierenaangelegenheden (Advisory Council on Animal Affairs)
SGP	Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij (Reformed Political Party)
SSS	Shoot, Shovel and Shut up
VVD	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy)
WENR	Wageningen Environmental Research
WOO	Wet open overheid
WUR	Wageningen University and Research

Photo: Ramon van Bentum

Executive summary

The grey wolf returned to the Netherlands in 2018 after an absence of nearly 150 years. Since then, public acceptance of the species has declined sharply, driven by livestock attacks, incidents involving people and their dogs, and the intensive spread of disinformation via social media. Against this backdrop, EcoJust in collaboration with Humane World for Animals, conducted a systematic investigation into wolf poaching and persecution in the Netherlands. The investigation took place between October 2025 and March 2026 and drew on interviews with 61 witnesses, open-source and social media research and an analysis of a decade of wolf monitoring data.

The principal finding is unambiguous:

Wolf persecution in the Netherlands is substantially more extensive, more organised and more geographically concentrated than has been publicly acknowledged.

A minimum of 41 wolves were reported to have been poached between October 2021 and March 2026 — a figure that almost certainly underestimates the true toll. It includes only animals for which a specific time and location could be established, and reflects only what witnesses willing to participate in the study were aware of and what open sources could confirm. Of the 259 wolves genetically confirmed in the Netherlands between 2015 and December 2025, 38 — nearly 15% — have disappeared without explanation from monitoring records, at a rate difficult to explain by natural mortality or emigration alone and consistent with systematic cryptic poaching (the hidden proportion of poaching that is not discovered or reported). The evidence points not to isolated, spontaneous incidents, but to a pattern of organised persecution concentrated primarily in the Veluwe and the northeastern provinces of Drenthe and Fryslân, although incidents have been documented in all provinces where wolves are present.

The primary perpetrators are two overlapping groups — livestock farmers and hunters — connected by dense social networks and, particularly in the northeastern provinces, by the traditional norm of noaberschap (neighbourly duty), which transforms individual grievances into collective illegal action. Methods include shooting, vehicle pursuit, deliberate run-overs, and poisoning. Carcasses are systematically concealed through burial, disposal in slurry pits, incineration, and submersion — techniques chosen specifically to eliminate evidence and prevent detection. What the evidence in this study suggests is that wolf persecution in the Netherlands is not a fringe phenomenon carried out by a handful of outliers, but a distributed, socially embedded practice, operating with near-total impunity, with tacit support from significant parts of the rural community and an organised infrastructure that facilitates it.

Five mutually reinforcing drivers sustain this infrastructure. Genuine economic and practical grievances among **livestock farmers** provide the initial fuel for this persecution, compounded by the fact that 89% of wolf attacks in 2025 involved completely unprotected livestock — a proportion that has remained essentially unchanged since 2020 despite a tenfold increase in attacks. **Social media** amplifies these grievances through well-documented dynamics: misinformation spreads faster than corrections, algorithms reward emotional intensity, and anti-wolf communities have built closed worldviews in which facts make little impression. **Political actors** — particularly right-wing populist and conservative parties at local, provincial and national level — have contributed to a climate in which illegal killing is normalised, not through explicit endorsement but through the consistent framing of the wolf as an alien presence and through the absence of political condemnation of the persecution documented in this report. **Fragmented governance** and the progressive **dismantling of rural wildlife law enforcement** — leaving large parts of the countryside as enforcement blind spots — have created conditions in which poaching carries negligible risk of detection or prosecution. Finally, and most durably, opposition to the wolf is embedded in **socio-cultural identities** — including hunting culture, the norm of noaberschap, and in Bible Belt communities a theological conviction rooted in a contested interpretation of rentmeesterschap (stewardship) — that are not amenable to conventional policy instruments.

The report also examines the dominant political response to the wolf conflict: the demand for culling. The scientific evidence nd consensus suggests that lethal wolf control does not reliably reduce livestock losses and may actively worsen conflict by destabilising pack structures and increasing the likelihood that surviving wolves turn to livestock. Furthermore, research shows that reducing legal protections for wolves is associated with increases in cryptic poaching, through a policy signal effect in which weaker protections lower both the perceived value of wolves and the perceived risk of illegal killing. The planned downlisting of the wolf's protection status in the Netherlands risks significantly worsening the persecution this report documents.

The report concludes with a set of evidence-based recommendations addressed to the national government, provincial governments, municipalities, law enforcement agencies and the public prosecutor's office, the hunters' and farmers' organisations, social media platforms, news media and journalists, and conservation and animal welfare organisations.

Key recommendations include:

- formally acknowledging the scale of wolf persecution as serious wildlife crime and making its detection, investigation and prosecution an enforcement priority;
- rebuilding rural wildlife law enforcement capacity;
- providing structural funding for wolf fencing support initiatives modelled on the successful Belgian example;
- initiating a genuine, sustained dialogue with affected rural communities;
- reforming the compensation framework to make it conditional on adequate livestock protection; and working proactively with communities in areas where wolves are expected to arrive before conflict has taken hold.

Whether welcomed or not, the wolf is back. The question facing Dutch society is not whether to tolerate its presence, but how to manage that presence in a way that is lawful, evidence-based, and fair to both the communities most affected and the species itself. The evidence in this report suggests that the Netherlands is currently far from meeting any of those three standards.

41

wolves (minimum) were reportedly poached between October 2021 and March 2026

>14%

of wolves disappeared in the Netherlands without explanation between 2015 and December 2025

89%

of wolf attacks in 2025 involved completely unprotected livestock

◄ Bram, the father of the Utrechtse Heuvelrug pack, who was culled on 2 December 2025 (see section 4.1.2).

Introduction

Photo: Inger Vik

Photo: Tirza Verwijs

Photo: Duco Jouke

1.1

Background

The grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) returned to the Netherlands in 2018, when a female wolf settled in the northern Veluwe after an absence of nearly 150 years. Its return was welcomed by conservation organisations and the broader public. In the years that followed, however, public acceptance declined rapidly (Motivaction/Min LNV, 2023, as cited in RDA, 2024). Wolf attacks on sheep and other livestock, incidents involving people and their dogs, and the intensive spread of disinformation via social media — amplified by some farmers' and hunters' organisations and politicians — have contributed to a deeply polarised debate in which the wolf has become a symbol of a broader cultural and political conflict between rural and urban Netherlands.

Against this backdrop, evidence of persecution began to emerge. On 1 October 2021, a shot wolf was found near Stroe in the Veluwe, Gelderland, and in February 2022, a carcass was found buried near Ugchelen, also in the Veluwe. In 2025, investigative reporting revealed that 22 of the 91 wolves registered in the Netherlands between 2015 and April 2023 had disappeared without trace, with no natural cause determined. In certain regions and packs — including the Midden-Veluwe and Zeeland — a striking number of animals had vanished. Experts expressed serious concern that a significant proportion of these disappearances may be attributable to poaching (Geelen, 2025).

These findings prompted EcoJust in collaboration with Humane World for Animals, to conduct a systematic investigation into wolf poaching and persecution in the Netherlands and the broader context in which it takes place. The investigation was conducted with the following objectives:

- To document the nature, scale and geographic distribution of wolf poaching and persecution in the Netherlands, drawing on witness testimony, social media research, open-source intelligence and an analysis of wolf monitoring data;
- To identify the primary perpetrators, their methods and their motivations;
- To examine the drivers — economic, social, political, cultural and institutional — that sustain wolf persecution and enable it to flourish with near-total impunity;
- To provide evidence-based recommendations to the institutions and actors best placed to address it.

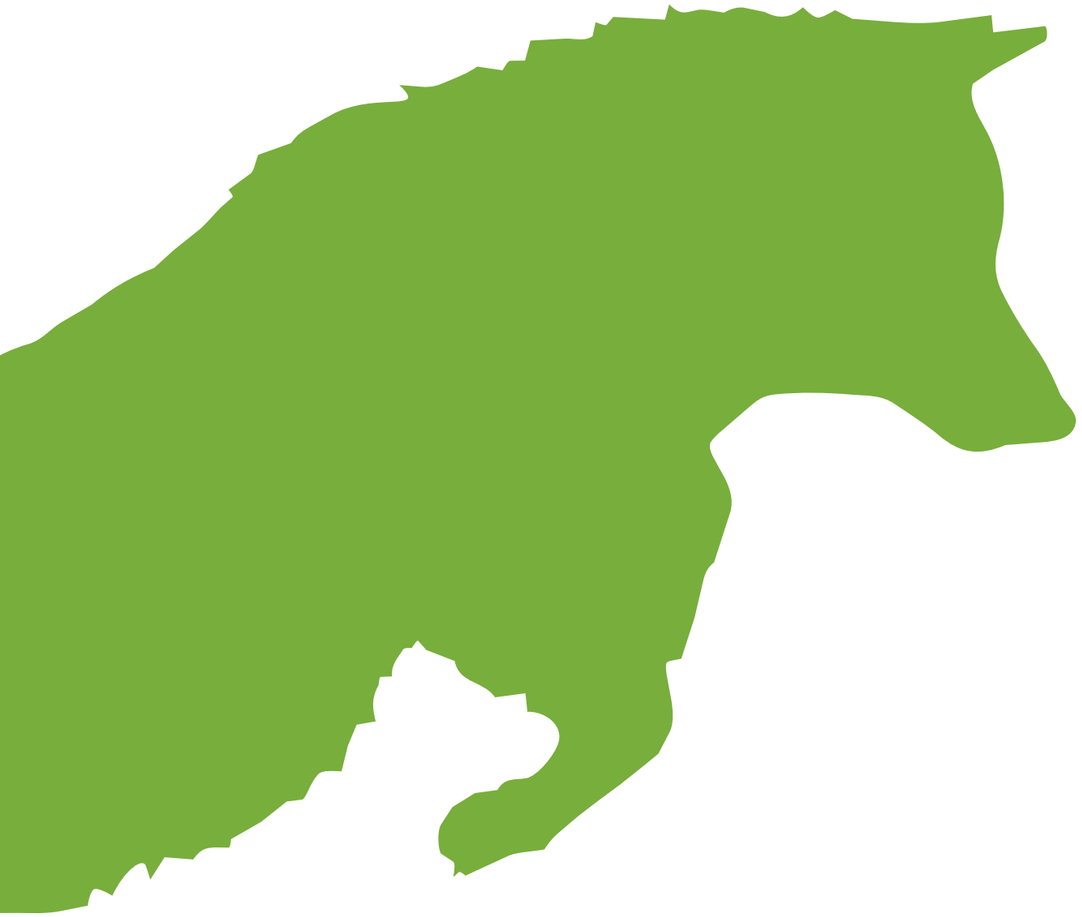
This report presents the findings of that investigation. It is hoped that by documenting the scale and seriousness of wolf persecution in the Netherlands — a phenomenon that has been substantially under-acknowledged in public and policy debate — it will contribute to greater awareness and inspire concrete action, for the sake of both the wolves and the communities that share their landscape.

>14%

of wolves registered in the Netherlands between 2015 and April 2023 disappeared without a trace

▲ Wolf Carcass, Ugchelen.

◂ She-wolf of the Noordwest-Veluwe pack.



1.2

Methodology

The investigation was conducted between 1 October 2025 and 31 March 2026 and draws on open-source and social media research, an analysis of a decade of wolf monitoring data and semi-structured interviews with 61 respondents.

Open-source research

Open-source research consisted of the systematic review and analysis of publicly available materials, including media reporting, social media content (Facebook, Instagram and X), data on wolves provided by BIJ12 (the executive agency supporting the twelve provinces in implementing wolf policies), policy documents, court records, and academic and NGO publications. As part of this work, open-source intelligence (OSINT) methods (Böhm & Lolagar, 2021) were used to monitor and analyse online discourse relating to wolves in the Netherlands. This included structured observation of social media environments, particularly Facebook groups representing both pro-wolf and anti-wolf viewpoints. Pro-wolf groups were defined as those whose predominant content and membership orientation favour the wolf's presence in the Netherlands; anti-wolf groups as those whose content and membership orientation oppose it. Groups were identified through keyword searches on Facebook and selected on the basis of relevance to the Dutch wolf debate and membership activity. The purpose was to assess prevailing sentiments, narratives, and attitudes, as well as to identify potential indicators of unlawful activity, including references to wolf poaching, suspected actors, locations, methods, and perceived motivations. Research was limited to content accessible to the researcher without technical intrusion and was conducted through passive observation and documentation. No direct interaction with group members took place.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 61 individuals, including rural residents, forest rangers, livestock farmers, sheep herders, hunters, NGO experts and politicians. Respondents participated primarily as witnesses, providing first-hand observations, experiences, or contextual information. Interviews were conducted in-person or remotely; remote interviews were conducted by telephone or via Signal or WhatsApp audio calls, selected as appropriate to each respondent's circumstances and preferences. The interviews were documented through notes and/or recordings, and transcribed where applicable. Respondents are referenced using anonymised witness codes [W01–W61], randomly assigned and unlinked to interview order, location, profession, or other personal characteristics. Where quotations or incidents are cited, contextual details were assessed and modified where necessary to prevent indirect identification while preserving substantive meaning.

Ethics, anonymisation, and safeguards

This report addresses a sensitive subject in which disclosure of respondents' identities could carry personal, professional, or legal consequences. The research was conducted in accordance with the principles of do no harm, informed consent, and confidentiality (Nethics, 2025). All respondents participated voluntarily, were informed of the purpose of the research and the measures taken to protect their identity, received no inducements, and could withdraw at any stage.

To protect respondents, the following measures were applied: identifying information was stored separately from testimonies and analysis; access to raw data and coding keys was restricted to the report authors; only information necessary for analysis was retained; and dates, locations, and other details were generalised where disclosure could increase identification risk. No identifying information has been shared externally or appears in this report.

These anonymisation measures occasionally limit the specificity of contextual detail, but this is a deliberate and proportionate safeguard to ensure participant safety and confidentiality.

Throughout this report, round brackets are used for standard citations — e.g. (BIJ12, 2019) — while square brackets are used exclusively to reference witness testimony — e.g. [W45].

Mapping of poaching and persecution hotspots

Information from interviewees on suspected and confirmed persecution incidents, as well as information on suspicious incidents identified on social media, was compiled in a structured Excel database. For each incident, the date or estimated date and location were recorded. Where exact locations were unknown, coordinates were assigned based on the nearest identifiable location, such as a named area, village, or road. Given that a number of coordinates are approximate, the resulting map should be read as indicative of geographic patterns at the municipality scale, rather than precise incident locations. Incidents were mapped by Rhizome Insights using Power BI.

Where incidents contained sufficiently specific detail to indicate that a wolf had been killed, these were used to calculate the minimum number of wolves reportedly poached. Where a single incident referred to multiple wolves, each was counted individually. Where an incident referred to an inexact number of wolves (e.g. 3-4 wolves), the lower number was used to calculate the minimum number. Given the nature of the sources, this figure represents a conservative lower bound rather than a comprehensive count.

For the purpose of calculating the total number of recorded poaching and persecution incidents and charting trends by year, a conservative counting approach was applied: only incidents that clearly relate to a specific event were included, excluding vague or general accounts in which witnesses described persecution activity in broad terms without reference to a particular occurrence.

The incident database covers the period from 1 October 2021 through 31 March 2026.

Identification of wolves that have disappeared

A list of all wolves with DNA recorded in the Netherlands between 2015 and 31 December 2025 was compiled from data available on the BIJ12 website (for an explanation of how wolves are monitored in the Netherlands, see section 3.5). The list, included as Annex 1, contains a total of 259 wolves. We then identified wolves whose DNA had not been detected for more than six months, either in the Netherlands or elsewhere in Europe, through analysis of BIJ12 data on confirmed wolf sightings (BIJ12, n.d.a) and livestock attacks (BIJ12, n.d.b), BIJ12 progress reports (BIJ12, n.d.a), as well as foreign wolf monitoring sources. For each wolf, we recorded the origin, first and last detection date in the Netherlands, last known location, status, and territory where applicable.

Following Jansman et al. (2021), wolves absent from monitoring records for more than six months are classified as having disappeared. This is consistent with the approach used in Scandinavian wolf monitoring (Liberg et al., 2012, 2020), in which prolonged absence from systematic monitoring serves as a proxy for presumed death, typically attributed to cryptic poaching. The last known locations of disappeared wolves were mapped as a proxy for possible poaching activity.

1.3

Terminology

Throughout this report, the terms **poaching** and **persecution** are used in a specific and deliberate way.

Persecution is used as the overarching term, encompassing all deliberate human actions intended to harm, harass, or remove wolves, regardless of whether they result in death. This includes illegal killing, attempted killing, running wolves down with vehicles, poisoning, harassment, and intentional disturbance.

Poaching — the illegal killing of a protected animal — is treated as the most serious subset of persecution and is used where the focus is specifically on lethal incidents.

This distinction reflects established terminology in wildlife crime and conservation science. In everyday usage, however, “poaching” is the more widely recognised term and carries greater public resonance. Both terms are therefore used in this report: persecution where analytical precision is required and poaching where the focus is on illegal killing or where broader accessibility is the primary consideration.

1.4

Contents of this report

This report is structured as follows:

Section 2 provides background on wolves in the Netherlands, covering the history of their return, population trends, recorded mortality, and the issue of bold wolf behaviour.

Section 3 provides an overview of the legal and policy framework governing wolf management in the Netherlands, including the wolf’s protection status, the interprovincial Wolf Plan, support available to livestock owners through compensation schemes and prevention measures, and national coordination efforts.

Section 4 presents the core empirical findings on wolf poaching and persecution in the Netherlands. It maps incidents by geographic hotspot, analyses the monitoring data on disappeared wolves, and examines the identity, motivations and methods of those responsible, including the role of organised networks and coordinated activity.

Section 5 examines the drivers of wolf persecution in depth, addressing human-wolf conflict and the protection gap, social media dynamics, political factors, governance and enforcement failures, and the socio-cultural and religious dimensions of the conflict.

Section 6 discusses the meaning and implications of the findings, relates them to the broader comparative literature on wolf persecution in Europe and North America, and addresses the specific question of culling as a proposed policy response.

Section 7 presents the conclusions of the study and the recommendations that follow from them, addressed to national and provincial government, law enforcement agencies, the hunting sector, farmers’ organisations, social media platforms and the broader conservation community, news media and journalists.

To assist readers unfamiliar with the geography of the Netherlands, Figure 1 on the right provides an orientation map showing the provinces and key regions referenced throughout this report.

Figure 1
Map of the Netherlands - Key regions and provinces

- North Eastern
- Central (Veluwe & Twente)
- Southern

Wolves in the Netherlands

Photo: Tirza Verwijs

Photo: Erik de Jonge

2.1

History and population trend

The grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) has made a remarkable comeback in Europe. The species was extirpated from most of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries but began to recover in the 1970s. Since then, its distribution in Europe has increased further due to several factors, including the abandonment of marginal rural areas and the increased availability of pristine habitats, explosive growth in ungulate populations, and broad legal protections against unregulated culling and — in the case of western Europe — the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, which removed a significant barrier to the westward dispersal of wolf populations from central and eastern Europe. In 2023, there were an estimated 23,000 wolves across 34 European countries (Kaczensky et al., 2024).

Having been absent in the Netherlands for nearly 150 years, wolves re-established themselves in 2018, when a she-wolf (known as GW998f) settled in the northern Veluwe. The Veluwe, located in the province of Gelderland in the centre of the Netherlands, is the largest contiguous lowland nature area in northwest Europe. Covering more than 100,000 hectares, its landscape is characterised by a diverse range of ecosystems, including forests, heathlands, drift sands and fens, interspersed with agricultural land. This combination of extensive woodland cover, varied terrain and relatively low human disturbance makes it particularly suitable wolf habitat and explains why the largest concentration of wolf territories in the Netherlands remains here today. A male wolf (GW893m) joined in early 2019, and this pair has successfully reproduced each year since. Since then, additional pairs and packs have formed, leading to a gradual expansion of the Dutch wolf population (BIJ12, n.d.a).

As of 2025, 14 wolf packs had been confirmed in the Netherlands. Most wolves are concentrated in the Veluwe region, where territories include Noordwest Veluwe, Noord Veluwe, Noordoost Veluwe, Midden-Veluwe, Zuidwest Veluwe, and Zuidoost Veluwe, as well as De Hoge Veluwe National Park (Figure 2). Four packs are established in Drenthe (Middenveld, Midden-Drenthe, Zuid Drenthe, and the Drents-Friese Regio). Additional packs include Gelderse Vallei Noord, Gelderse Vallei and the Utrechtse Heuvelrug, while a solitary wolf has been recorded in southwest Brabant/Flanders. Another solitary wolf who stayed in the Utrechtse Heuvelrug (GW4243f) since May 2024 was killed in traffic in September 2025. Dispersing wolves continue to roam across large parts of the country while seeking new territories (BIJ12, n.d.a).

Researchers at Wageningen Environmental Research have conducted a habitat suitability analysis which estimates that the Netherlands provides suitable habitat for at least 23 wolf packs — substantially more than the 14 currently established. Suitable habitat is mainly situated in the north and east of the Netherlands, including the Utrechtse Heuvelrug and eastern Noord-Brabant (Biersteker et al., 2024).

Genetic analyses indicate that wolves present in the Netherlands originate from two distinct source populations: the Central European population, primarily from Germany and Poland, and the Alpine population, originating from Italy and France. To date, the vast majority of wolves recorded in the Netherlands belong to the Central European population, with only four individuals identified as originating from the Alpine population (BIJ12, n.d.a.).

14

wolf packs had been confirmed in the Netherlands in 2025

◂ She-wolf GW4097f in nature reserve Markiezaat, Noord-Brabant.

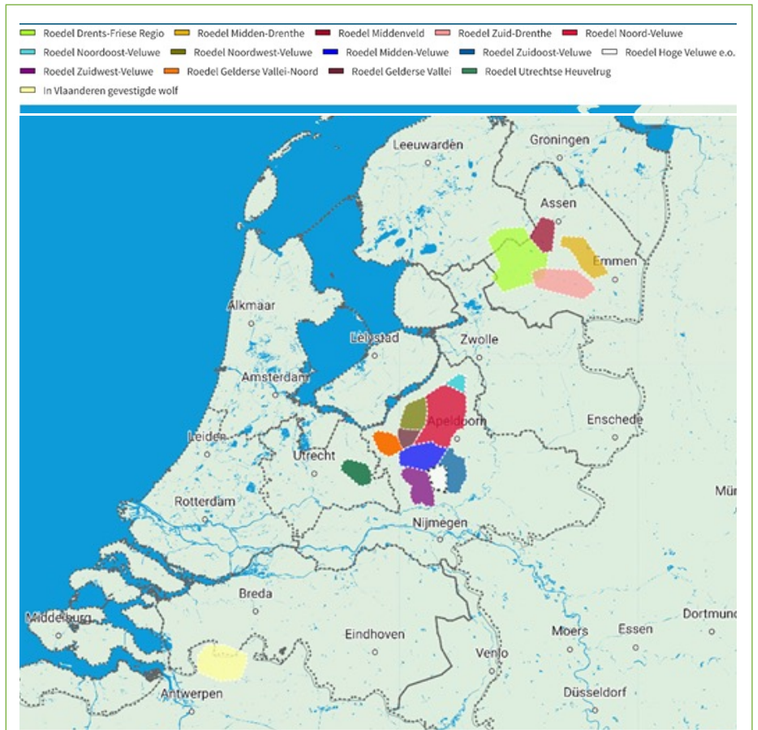


Figure 2 Established wolf packs (‘roedels’) in the Netherlands, 2025. Source: BIJ12.


Photo: Arjen Heeres

2.2

Number of wolves

Between March 2015 and 31 December 2025, a total of 259 wolves have been confirmed in the Netherlands through DNA analysis (see Annex 1).

In 2025, 131 individual wolves were identified in the Netherlands through DNA analysis. Of these, 79 were identified in the Netherlands for the first time. Approximately 70% of these new wolves are descendants of Dutch wolf packs (BIJ12, 2026). A total of 46 pups from 10 packs were confirmed on camera trap footage.

The number of wolves currently present in the Netherlands is undoubtedly higher than what has been identified through DNA analysis. First, it is possible some of the pups born in 2025 have not left recorded DNA traces, such as scat. In addition, to shorten processing times, since October 2024 DNA collected from livestock depredation incidents in known territories is often used only for species confirmation rather than individual identification. As a result, resident wolves appear less frequently in official lists of identified individuals (BIJ12, 2024b). Furthermore, some wolves remain effectively undetected: individuals that prey exclusively on wild animals and do not attack livestock are sampled less often, and wolves living in areas without monitoring permission—such as De Hoge Veluwe National Park—may remain genetically invisible (BIJ12, 2024a).

▲ Wolf mother with young, Zuidwest Veluwe.

Packs	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Drents-Friese Regio	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3	8	7	4	22
Midden-Drenthe	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	5	5	4	14
Middenveld	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	5	5
Zuid-Drenthe	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3	3
Noord-Veluwe	4	6	5	6	6	5	-	32
Noordoost-Veluwe	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	5	3	4	12
Noordwest-Veluwe	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	5	3	5	13
Midden-Veluwe	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4	-	6	-	10
Zuidoost-Veluwe	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4	7	4	15
Hoge Veluwe	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	-	-	-	-	-
Zuidwest-Veluwe	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	7	12	8	27
Gelderse Vallei-Noord	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3	-	3
Gelderse Vallei	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4	4
Utrechtse Heuvelrug	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	5	5	10
Total pups	**4**	**6**	**5**	**13**	**40**	**56**	**46**	**170**

Table 1 Minimum number of pups per pack established through camera traps. Source: BIJ12 Jaarrapportage wolven 2025.
['n.a.': no pack established yet. '-' : no camera trap images with pups available]

2.3

Wolf mortality

Between 2017 and 2025, 81 dead wolves have been registered in the Netherlands, 29 of which occurred in 2025. As the population has grown, so has the number of recorded deaths. Traffic accidents were by far the leading cause of mortality: 57 wolves (70%) were killed in collisions with vehicles or subsequently euthanised due to their injuries (Figure 3). After traffic, suspected aggression or competition between wolves (predation) is the second most common registered cause of death — a pattern likely reflecting increased intraspecific conflict as the population grows and territories become more contested.

It is striking that BIJ12 has recorded only two poaching incidents — in 2021 and 2022 — despite a growing wolf population and intensifying conflict in subsequent years. As the findings presented in section 4 demonstrate, the actual extent of poaching is substantially greater than official mortality data suggest. A plausible explanation for the absence of confirmed cases since 2022 is that perpetrators have become considerably more careful in concealing wolf carcasses — possibly in response to the police investigations launched following the discovery of the two wolves found dead under suspicious circumstances in Stroe and Ugchelen.

The mortality data recorded by BIJ12 inevitably presents an incomplete picture for a further reason: an unknown number of wolves are never recovered at all. Some die of natural causes in remote or inaccessible locations, while others are illegally killed and their carcasses destroyed or concealed to avoid detection. This undetected fraction of illegal killing is known as "cryptic poaching" — a term first introduced by Liberg et al. (2012) in their study of the Scandinavian wolf population, in which more than two-thirds of all poaching proved to be cryptic. A comparable study of wolves in the Jutland peninsula found that cryptic mortality — most likely illegal killing — was the dominant cause of wolf disappearances in Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein, leading the authors to conclude that the region functions as a wolf population sink despite successful reproduction (Sunde et al., 2021). The confirmed mortality data presented here should therefore be understood as a lower-bound estimate of the true toll of illegal killing, and the analysis of wolf disappearances in section 4.2 examines this phenomenon in the Dutch context.

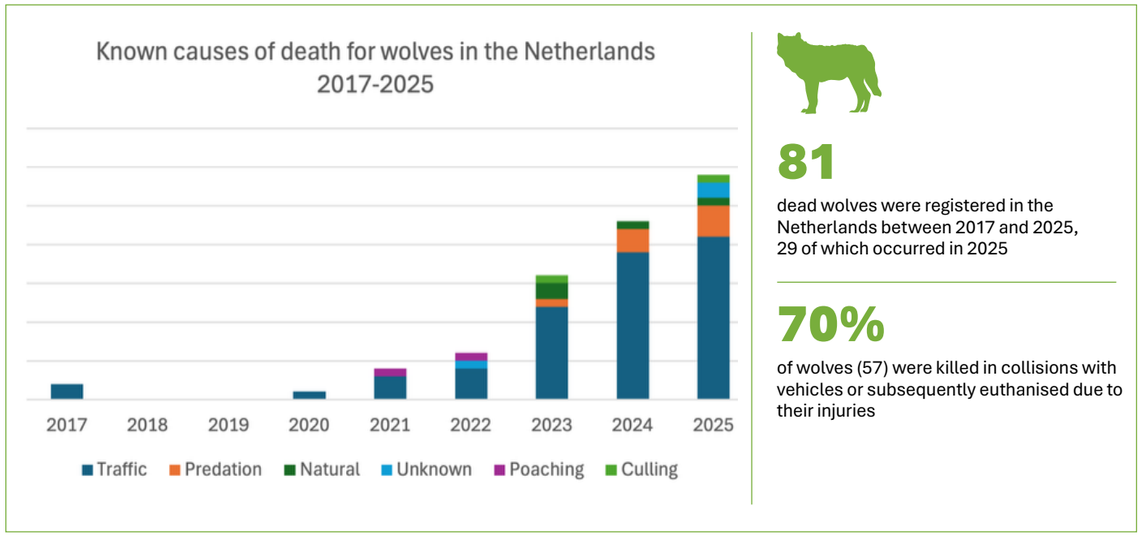


Figure 3 Known causes of death for wolves in the Netherlands, 2017–2025. Source: BIJ12.
'Traffic' includes wolves killed in collisions with cars or trains, as well as wolves subsequently euthanised due to collision injuries.
'Predation' refers to wolves killed by other wolves.
'Unknown' indicates cases where the cause of death could not be established.

Photo: Tirza Verwijs

2.4

Wolf behaviour and human safety

In August 2024, the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE) — a specialist group of the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Species Survival Commission — wrote to the Dutch State Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature and the provincial governments, urging them to adopt a consistent national policy for preventing and managing bold wolf behaviour (LCIE, 2024).

The letter noted that since the wolf's return to the Netherlands, several incidents had occurred in which wolves repeatedly approached people and dogs, in some cases interacting with them. Given the Netherlands' high human and dog population densities and the intensity of recreational activity in wolf habitats, the LCIE considered an effective response particularly urgent. With wolf numbers expected to grow and their range to expand, such incidents are likely to become more frequent.

The LCIE made two core recommendations:

Recommendation 1
First, prevention through public information campaigns and enforceable regulations — including leash requirements, access restrictions, and a prohibition on feeding wolves — with clear messaging, adequate enforcement capacity, and appropriate sanctions.

Recommendation2
Second, swift and decisive action when incidents do occur, including intensified monitoring and, where necessary, capture, radio-collaring, and targeted hazing of the individual animal concerned. The letter cautioned that delaying such measures significantly increases the risk of escalating behaviour and ultimately the need for lethal removal.

The LCIE specifically called for standardised operational protocols, rather than optional guidelines, supported by one or more permanently available, interdisciplinary intervention teams with the necessary equipment, expertise, and pre-authorised permits. It also noted that taking all appropriate non-lethal steps is a legal prerequisite under the EU Habitats Directive: failure to do so risks any subsequent authorisation for lethal removal being successfully challenged in court.

The risk that wolves pose to human safety is a significant feature of public debate in the Netherlands and deserves honest engagement. Research covering the period 2002–2020 found evidence for 12 wolf attacks on humans in Europe and North America combined, of which two were fatal; the authors concluded that "the risks associated with a wolf attack are above zero, but far too low to calculate" (Linnell et al., 2021). For context, in the Netherlands 29 people died from dog bites over a 25-year period (Cornelissen & Hopster, 2009). As the LCIE letter above underlines, bold wolf behaviour nonetheless poses genuine risks that require prompt and effective management. The statistical rarity of attacks does not mean the risk is zero, but it does mean that public fear is disproportionate to the actual probability of an encounter — a gap that has significant implications for how wolf policy is communicated and how institutions responsible for that policy are perceived by the public.

Public fear is disproportionate to the actual probability of an encounter

◂ Female wolf in the Kroondomein, Veluwe.

Laws and policies

Photo: Arjen Heeres

Photo: Dirk Hoogenstein

3.1

Protection status

With wolf numbers in Europe increasing, the IUCN has classified the species at the continental level as "*Least Concern*" in 2022. However, this overall status masks significant regional differences. Of the nine recognised European wolf populations, five — including the Central European population to which the Netherlands belongs — were assessed as "*Near Threatened*," while the Scandinavian population was classified as "*Vulnerable*" (LCIE, 2022). In practical terms, this means that although wolves are recovering across Europe as a whole, several regional populations remain relatively small, fragmented, or subject to ongoing pressures, such as a lack of genetic diversity and hybridisation with free-roaming dogs and therefore continue to require careful conservation and management measures.

Recent genomic research adds further weight to these concerns. Analysis of more than 200 whole genomes spanning five major European wolf populations found that all populations have effective population sizes well below the threshold for long-term viability and show extensive inbreeding — leading the authors to conclude that "none of these populations currently meets thresholds associated with favourable conservation status," directly challenging claims that downlisting European wolves is biologically warranted (Ravagni et al., 2026 [Preprint]).

Until recently, wolves were classified as a "**strictly protected fauna species**" under both the Bern Convention and the EU Habitats Directive. This status imposed stringent conservation measures, making it illegal to capture, kill, disturb, or trade wolves. On 3 December 2024, however, the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention adopted a proposal by the European Union to downgrade the wolf's status from "strictly protected fauna species" (Appendix II) to "**protected fauna species**" (Appendix III). This change entered into force on 6 March 2025. Subsequently, on 5 June 2025, the European Union amended its own legislation by moving the wolf from Annex IV to Annex V of the Habitats Directive (Council of the European Union, 2025).

The downlisting decision has been widely criticised by scientists (LCIE, 2024; Randi, E. et al., 2025; Fleurke and Trouwborst, 2025) and civil society (European Environmental Bureau, 2025) for lacking the necessary scientific basis and being politically driven. Downlisting the wolf's protection status will make it easier for European countries to cull wolves considered to pose a threat to livestock or humans. It is also feared that the downlisting will set a dangerous precedent for other species considered a nuisance by humans — including bears, golden jackals, lynxes, birds of prey, cormorants and grey seals.

Implementation in the Netherlands

The downlisting has not yet been transposed into Dutch law. In January 2026 a draft administrative order designed to implement the change and to relax the legal framework for killing "problem wolves" was suspended by the House of Representatives until a new government was in place (Tweede Kamer, 2026). It is noteworthy that in September 2025, the Council of State had advised that the draft administrative order should not be adopted. The Council of State found the proposed rules for capturing or killing problem wolves too broad and insufficiently justified, particularly given that the wolf currently has an unfavourable conservation status in The Netherlands, and advised that permits should remain strictly individual, rather than granted in advance through general "umbrella" licences (Raad van State 2025).

In April 2026, the new State Secretary for Agriculture, Silvio Erkens, informed the House of Representatives that he had revised the draft administrative order in response to the Council of State's earlier criticism, narrowing the definitions of 'problem wolf' and 'problem situation' and introducing additional safeguards. On 24 April 2026, the Council of Ministers approved resubmitting the revised draft to the Council of State for urgent advice. The State Secretary has stated his intention to publish the order in the *Staatsblad* (the Netherlands' government gazette) and bring it into force before the summer of 2026 (Erkens, 2026).

Several European wolf populations remain relatively small, fragmented, or subject to ongoing pressures, such as a lack of genetic diversity

◂ Wolf in a German wildlife park.


Photo: Lue Hoogenstein

3.2

Provincial Wolf Plan 2025

In The Netherlands, the provinces are responsible for implementing and enforcing wolf protection policies. The interprovincial Wolf Plan (*Wolvenplan* 2025) of the Interprovinciaal Overleg (IPO, Association of Provinces of the Netherlands) sets out the national policy framework for managing the return and expansion of wolves in the Netherlands, replacing earlier interprovincial plans and guidelines. It aims to support conflict-reduced coexistence by balancing legal protection of wolves with measures to prevent damage, particularly to livestock.

The plan outlines roles and responsibilities of provinces, monitoring and data collection methods, legal frameworks, prevention subsidies, compensation schemes, and communication strategies. It also introduces intervention guidelines with so-called 'escalation ladders' for four potential problem scenarios: wolf-human, wolf-dog, wolf-livestock, and dead or injured wolves.

The guidelines are a tool for authorities, managers and practitioners to identify a problem situation or 'problem wolf' and decide on the desired course of action. Culling a 'problem wolf' is only allowed as an ultimate remedy when aversive conditioning has failed or is practically not possible. This requires a permit based on the Omgevingswet (Environment and Planning Act) unless there is an acute emergency. Authorities must always carefully document steps taken according to the escalation ladder. Recognising both ecological benefits and social tensions associated with the wolf's return, the plan emphasises prevention, knowledge development, coordinated governance, and adaptive policy as wolf numbers and distribution continue to grow (IPO, 2025).

Wolvenplan 2025.
www.bij12.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Wolvenplan-2025.pdf

▲ Wolves in a German wildlife park.

3.3

Preventive measures

BIJ12 offers a Fauna Damage Prevention Kit (*Faunaschade Preventiekit*) to help livestock owners implement effective protective measures. The kit draws on standards developed in Germany, where wolf-repellent fencing and other preventive measures have been widely implemented and proven to be effective (BIJ12, n.d.e). It covers five categories of measures: electric fencing, overnight penning of livestock, livestock guardian dogs, fladry, and measures specific to cattle and horses. For each measure, the kit discusses its effectiveness in deterring wolves, practical applicability, effects on other animals, relative costs, and relevant regulations where applicable. All measures included have been assessed as effective on the basis of available scientific and practical studies, expert judgement, and livestock owners' field experience (BIJ12, n.d.c).

Beyond this national toolkit, many provinces have developed their own regional approaches. Local wolf committees develop area-specific prevention plans, wolf advisers support livestock owners in the field, and subsidy schemes are widely available to finance damage-prevention measures. While uptake varies across regions, willingness to implement preventive measures is generally increasing. Provinces have also deployed emergency measures — including crisis response schemes and temporary fencing — in areas experiencing acute damage incidents (IPO, 2025).

Since wolf policy implementation is delegated to the provinces, the level of financial support available to livestock owners differs considerably across the country. Drenthe and Fryslân, for example, provide up to €30,000 per applicant for wolf-proof fencing. Groningen also provides a maximum amount of €30,000 per applicant, though limited only to sheep and goat owners. Gelderland offers a maximum of €20,000, while Overijssel limits support to 50% of costs for professional livestock keepers and 90% for private owners (Provincial subsidy regulations, 2024–2025).

The level of practical support also varies considerably across provinces. In Drenthe, for example, wolf advisers provide guidance to livestock owners both before and after the installation of wolf-proof fencing, to ensure compliance with BIJ12 guidelines and maximise the protection afforded to livestock (Provincie Drenthe, n.d.). In Gelderland, the province with the most wolves, no equivalent support is available. The consequence is that livestock owners in less well-supported provinces may invest significant time and money in fencing that fails to meet the required standard — and discover this only when their animals are attacked. This inconsistency not only undermines the effectiveness of the national prevention framework but also risks eroding trust in government wolf policy and, with it, public willingness to coexist with wolves.

Where livestock owners make the effort to install wolf-proof fencing, mistakes in installation are common and can render the fencing ineffective. The province of Gelderland has documented the five most frequently observed deficiencies in wolf-repellent fencing installed by livestock owners: access gates that are not wolf-proof; voltage loss on the electric wires due to vegetation growing against them; fence height below the required 120 centimetres; uneven ground beneath the fence allowing wolves to pass underneath; and unprotected water edges where fencing meets a ditch or watercourse (BIJ12, 2026). Each of these deficiencies creates a potential entry point for wolves and can undermine an otherwise adequate installation. This underlines the importance of professional guidance both before and after installation — and illustrates why the inconsistency in wolf adviser support across provinces, described above, has practical consequences for the effectiveness of livestock protection (Provincie Gelderland, n.d.).

The financial gaps in provincial subsidy schemes described above are not inevitable. EU state aid rules allow Member States to provide full (100%) compensation for both direct and indirect costs arising from livestock losses caused by wolves and other large carnivores, as well as full reimbursement for preventive measures such as fencing, livestock-guarding dogs and associated labour costs (European Parliament, 2022). The Netherlands does not currently make full use of the funding possibilities available under these provisions. Provincial subsidy schemes cap the amount available to individual applicants and do not cover all eligible costs, meaning that the full reimbursement EU state aid rules permit is not achieved in practice.

Practical and financial support for preventive measures is inconsistent across provinces — reducing effectiveness and farmer cooperation


Photo: Arjen Heeres

3.4

Compensation of livestock damages

Under Article 1.6(3) of the Decree on Animal Keepers (*Besluit houders van dieren*), livestock owners are legally required to protect their animals, for instance against wolf attacks. In December 2025, the Administrative Court of Trade and Industry (*College van Beroep voor het Bedrijfsleven*) reaffirmed this obligation, ruling that the minister had insufficient grounds to reject an enforcement request by NGO Animal Rights against a sheep farmer who had failed to implement adequate protective measures despite repeated attacks (College van Beroep voor het Bedrijfsleven, 2025).

In practice, the compensation framework undermines this duty. As of February 2026, livestock owners can still claim compensation for wolf damage even where preventive measures were absent or inadequate — rewarding precisely the behaviour the law prohibits. This creates a moral hazard: losses that may have been preventable are absorbed by the public purse, reducing incentives to invest in protection and penalising those who have done so.

Compensation is administered by BIJ12 under the Environment and Planning Act (*Omgevingswet*) and is payable where wolf involvement is confirmed or considered highly likely, based on DNA analysis or established assessment protocols. In the early phase of the wolf's return, compensation was deliberately granted regardless of prevention, to give livestock owners time to adapt. That transitional approach is now being revised.

Provinces are moving towards making the implementation of preventive measures a condition for compensation within designated wolf territories, bringing financial eligibility in line with the legal duty of care. Exceptions will apply outside designated wolf areas and where preventive measures are not reasonably feasible, such as in extensive grazing systems or difficult terrain. A phased transition of up to two years has been introduced to align compensation rules with prevention obligations as wolf populations and policy frameworks mature (IPO, 2025).

In practice, however, this shift has fallen short of what was originally proposed. In 2023, Pieter van Geel, wolf adviser to the provinces, recommended phasing out unconditional compensation and making it conditional on adequate livestock protection. The twelve provinces initially adopted this advice, including it in a draft plan as a firm requirement. Following pressure from livestock farmers and the BBB provincial executives of Gelderland and Drenthe, the final plan was weakened: provinces may choose to make protective measures a condition for compensation, but are not obligated to do so (NOS, 2024a; NU.nl, 2025).

▲ Wolf with horses, Zuidwest Veluwe.

3.5

Wolf monitoring

The Wolf Monitoring Plan (*Monitoringplan Wolf*, BIJ12, 2019) provides a standardised national framework, primarily aimed at meeting reporting obligations under the EU Habitats Directive. It defines institutional roles, sets out internationally aligned monitoring methods — including passive monitoring via public reports and active methods, such as track surveys, camera trapping, DNA analysis, GPS collaring, and investigation of dead animals — and establishes strict validation criteria based on SCALP standards. Monitoring approaches are tailored to the stage of wolf establishment, from dispersing individuals to breeding packs, and focus on population size, distribution, reproduction, and territory use.

BIJ12 formally oversees monitoring through the Wolf Reporting Point (*Wolvenmeldpunt*); the Mammal Society (*Zoogdiervereniging*) handles daily operations, including verifying reports and managing territory coordinators and field volunteers. Wageningen Environmental Research (WENR) conducts post-mortem examinations of dead wolves, genetic analyses of scat and prey remains, and assigns unique GW-codes to individual wolves.

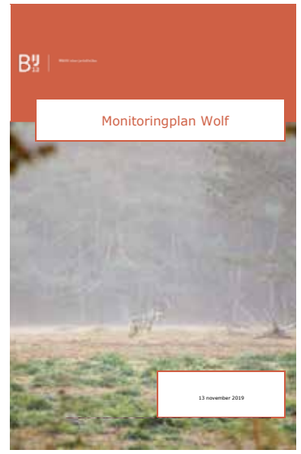
DNA analysis

DNA analysis is the most reliable method for confirming wolf presence and is used wherever possible (Marucco et al., 2025). Two types are carried out: species identification, conducted monthly and used primarily in cases of suspected livestock predation; and individual identification, which establishes sex, identity, and where possible the origin of the wolf. The latter also covers samples from field monitoring — scat, hair, wild prey, and dead wolves — and forms an integral part of population monitoring. Not all samples are analysed, as this would be costly with limited additional value; analysis is therefore targeted at territory boundaries and situations requiring individual identification.

For livestock damage specifically, individual-level DNA analysis is carried out in all cases outside known wolf territories, and within known territories where livestock protection meets the advisory standard. Where protection does not meet that standard, individual identification is only conducted when data on the resident wolves is insufficient (BIJ12, n.d.d).

Research on dead wolves

Every wolf found dead in the Netherlands is subject to investigation. Wageningen Environmental Research (WENR) conducts a field investigation of the circumstances of death, while postmortem analysis is carried out in collaboration with the Dutch Wildlife Health Centre (DWHC), with WENR focusing on ecological parameters and DWHC on veterinary and pathological findings. The carcass can yield valuable monitoring data, including information on cause of death, age, condition, and origin. For the full procedure in the event of a dead or injured wolf, see the Intervention Guideline (*Interventierichtlijn situatie aangereden en/of dood gevonden wolf*) in the IPO Wolf Plan (IPO, 2025).



Monitoringplan Wolf, 2019
www.bij12.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Monitoringplan-Wolf-2019.pdf

Photo: Tirza Verwijs

3.6

National coordination of wolf policy

While the provinces are responsible for implementing wolf policy, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature (*Ministerie van Landbouw, Visserij, Voedselzekerheid en Natuur,* LVVN) sets the national legal framework and ensures compliance with European and international obligations, including reporting to the European Commission under the Habitats Directive.

LVVN coordinates its approach through the National Wolf Strategy (*Landelijke Aanpak Wolven*), developed in close cooperation with the provinces and covering prevention, knowledge-sharing, and international collaboration (LVVN & IPO, 2024). As part of this strategy, the National Wolf Information Point (*Landelijk Informatiepunt Wolven*) was established jointly by the national government and the provinces and opened in autumn 2025, providing a central point of contact for public enquiries about wolf behaviour and coexistence (Landelijk Informatiepunt Wolven, n.d.).

In response to the increasingly polarised public debate surrounding the wolf's return, the then Ministers of Agriculture and of Nature commissioned the Raad voor Dierenaangelegenheden (RDA) — the government's independent advisory council on animal affairs — to organise a broad societal dialogue on coexistence with wolves in the Netherlands and to advise on what is needed to make that coexistence work.

The RDA conducted structured dialogue sessions with local communities in Elspeet, Dwingeloo and Austerlitz, as well as with national organisations, and published a detailed advisory report in May 2024 (*Samen leven met wolven in Nederland*, RDA, 2024). The RDA concluded that doing nothing is not an option; that the social and emotional dimensions of the conflict have been systematically neglected in favour of technical and economic responses; and that a national implementation agenda is urgently needed — one that addresses the diversity of experiences, dilemmas and emotions that coexistence with wolves generates.

Among its specific recommendations were direct and generous investment in protective measures, making compensation conditional on adequate protection, sustained structured dialogue with affected communities involving social scientists, and the establishment of a national wolf team providing practical support. The Cabinet responded positively to the report (Ministerie van LNV, 2024) but stopped short of committing to the specific measures proposed.

At the time of writing, progress on the national implementation agenda recommended by the RDA has been limited: while the National Expert Team Wolf is in the process of being established, the sustained structured dialogue with affected communities that the RDA identified as essential has not been initiated.

The social and emotional dimensions of the conflict have been systematically neglected in favour of technical and economic responses

◂ Young wolf of the Noordwest-Veluwe pack.

Findings: the scale and nature of wolf persecution

Photo: Ramon van Bentum

This section presents the findings of this report on wolf poaching and persecution in the Netherlands. It draws on three complementary sources of evidence: witness testimony collected through interviews with 61 respondents; open-source and social media research; and an analysis of wolf monitoring data covering the period 2015–2025.

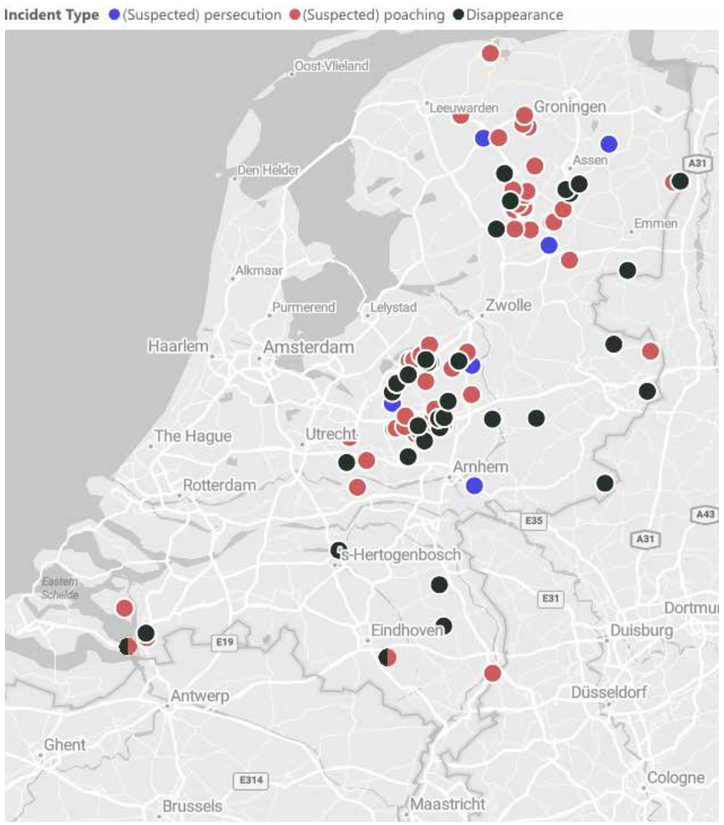
Section 4.1 documents the geographic distribution of recorded incidents, examining in detail the areas where poaching and persecution activity is most concentrated and the specific incidents that have occurred there.

Section 4.2 examines monitoring data covering the period 2015–2025, identifying 38 wolves that have disappeared without explanation — the invisible toll that witness testimony and international research suggest is largely attributable to cryptic poaching.

Sections 4.3 and 4.4 turn to the perpetrators: who is behind this activity and by what means it is carried out.

The map below (Figure 4) shows the locations of the 69 poaching incidents and eight persecution incidents ¬— confirmed or suspected — recorded in this study, together with the last known locations of the 38 disappeared wolves. Together they provide a geographic overview of the scale and distribution of wolf persecution in the Netherlands between 2016 and 2026.

What emerges from this evidence is not a picture of isolated, spontaneous incidents, but of organised, recurring, and geographically concentrated persecution activity that has, to date, escaped legal consequence.



38

wolves disappeared without explanation between 2015-2025

69

poaching incidents between 2016 and 2026

8

persecution incidents—confirmed or suspected

Figure 4 Locations of (suspected) wolf poaching and persecution as well as disappearances.

4.1

Wolf poaching and persecution hotspots

The research uncovered systematic poaching and persecution of wolves, concentrated in two main hotspots: the Veluwe (Gelderland province) and the Northeastern provinces Drenthe, Fryslân and Groningen. There are indications that poaching also occurs in Overijssel, the southern provinces Zeeland, Noord-Brabant and Limburg, and possibly in Utrecht.

Based on the witness testimony and open-source data gathered for this study, a minimum of 41 wolves were poached across the Netherlands between 1 October 2021 and 31 March 2026. This figure includes only animals for which a specific time and location could be established; the true number is almost certainly higher. These 41 wolves represent nearly 16% of all wolves ever recorded in the Netherlands.

Map of the Netherlands
- Key regions and provinces

- North Eastern
- Central (Veluwe & Twente)
- Southern

4.1.1

Northeast Netherlands (Drenthe/Fryslân/Groningen)

This study identified 31 reports of (suspected) poaching and persecution incidents in the northeastern provinces of Drenthe, Fryslân and Groningen that occurred between 1 October 2021 and 31 March 2026. The majority took place in Drenthe (20), followed by Fryslân (6) and Groningen (5). A minimum number of 14 wolves were killed in these incidents. The monitoring data corroborates this picture: of the 38 wolves that have disappeared without explanation from Dutch monitoring records since 2015, eight were last detected in Drenthe, one in Fryslân, and one in Groningen — together accounting for more than a quarter of all documented disappearances nationwide (see section 4.2).

Most incidents are concentrated in villages around National Park Drents-Friese Wold (including Beilen, Diever, Doldersum, Oude Willem and Wapse) and the area around National Park Dwingelderveld (including Ansen, Dwingeloo, Fluitenberg, Hollandscheveld and Spier).

The data show a sharp increase in incidents since 2022, the year when wolves first settled and established a permanent population in Drents-Friese Wold (see figure 5 below). The number of persecutions and/or poaching incidents more than doubled from 2023 to 2024 and has continued to increase. As data collection for this study halted in March 2026, it is to be expected the trend will continue to rise.

Witness accounts and social media research paint a consistent picture: wolves in this region are being systematically poached and persecuted.

Persecution of wolves

Small groups of rural residents, including farmers and hunters, conduct nocturnal vehicle patrols to locate and pursue wolves, guided by real-time wolf sighting alerts distributed by the No Wolves Benelux foundation through their website geenwolf.com and associated social media channels[1].

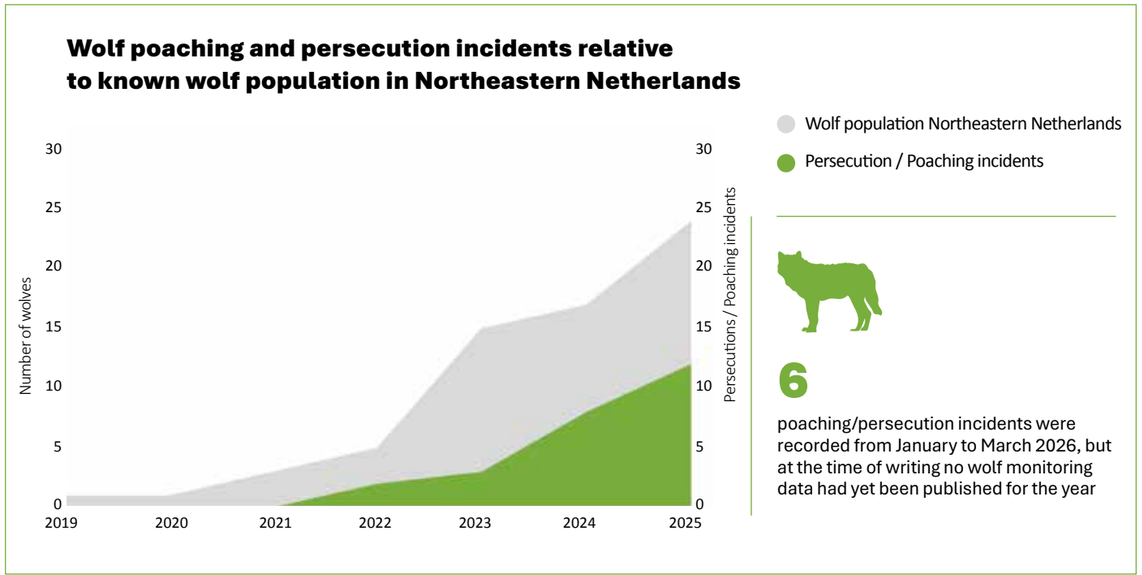


Figure 5 Number of poaching and persecution incidents recorded in northeast Netherlands, relative to the population of identified wolves.
The first wolf was observed in 2019, but the record of poaching and persecution incidents is from October 2022-December 2025.

[1] Including Facebook group Geen wolf zoekt leden and Instagram account Wolvenmeldpunt Geen Wolf, both managed by members of No Wolves Benelux.


Photo: Fria Nynke

In January 2024, a witness reported that drive hunts took place on 13 January on the Uffelter Es in Uffelte (Westerveld, Drenthe) after wolf sight alerts shared on Geenwolf.com. He added that he had witnessed such hunts multiple times, some with dogs [W09]. In April 2024, a video went viral on social media of a wolf chasing a roe deer that was nearly killed by a car on the Hunzeweg near Nieuw Annerveen, a village in Aa en Hunze municipality, Drenthe. Witnesses reported that youth groups were hunting the wolf on quads [W27].

On 10 March 2026, a sheep owner and resident of Zevenhuizen — a village part of Westerkwartier municipality in the south of Groningen province, near the borders with Drenthe and Fryslân — posted on a Facebook group that in his area locals have the situation *"under control": "patrolling every night for years now, and a good tip-off system helps us with that"* . He closed with an unambiguous threat: "*The wolf that shows up here had better not have done that. Clear enough!!!"*. Two days later, he posted again on the same Facebook group, stating *"We are not standing by despondently; in our immediate vicinity we've only had 1 attack in 2.5 years. Okay... you still have to go out late at night... but so be it!! I'm not going to put it any clearer...!!"*.

This is corroborated by a witness who reported that a group of residents is actively hunting wolves across a broad area of southwest Groningen — including Tolbert, Niebert, Nuis, Roden, Marum, Kornhorn, Zevenhuizen, and Jonkersvaart, largely within the municipality of Westerkwartier — using sighting alerts distributed through the Facebook group *Wolvenmeldpunt* Geen Wolf [W01].

Some 50 kilometres further south, around Diever in the Westerveld municipality — on the southern edge of National Park Drents-Friese Wold — a group of individuals is reportedly conducting nocturnal hunts for wolves using vehicles fitted with roof-mounted light bars. According to the same witness, the group has already killed one or two wolves [W09].

Poaching of wolves

Several further incidents contain specific detail about wolves being attacked and/or killed.

In 2022, a farmer in Ureterp (Opsterland, Fryslân), was reported to have shot and killed a wolf and burned its carcass in a fire barrel [W45]. That same year, in October 2022, a farmer in Fluitenberg (Hoogeveen, Drenthe) admitted to deliberately ramming and injuring a wolf with his vehicle after it killed his goat (RTV Drenthe, 2022).

On 9 July 2023, a wolf that had become trapped inside a livestock enclosure after attacking sheep and a goat in Wapse, Drenthe, was shot dead by a police officer on the order of the acting mayor after attacking animals and biting the livestock owner who confronted it with a hayfork and a shovel. In its press release of 20 June 2024, the Dutch Public Prosecution Service stated that the shooting was unjustified under nature protection law because there was no acute threat to human life and alternatives were available. Nevertheless, it dismissed the case, citing criminal immunity for the mayor, deputy mayor and police officer, and insufficient evidence against the landowner and his son (Openbaar Ministerie, 2024).

▲ Wolf killed by car on the Huenderweg in Doldersum, Drenthe, near Dwingelderveld on 11 December 2025.

Photo: Marcel van Kammen

> ***"Just quit talking about it and take measures against the wolf yourself. Where I live, they were there too, but they have been dealt with. Nobody talks about it — you just hear a shot sometimes. Everyone here knows it, but it is not discussed"***

In late December 2023, a young male wolf from the Drents-Friese Regio pack disappeared. The wolf, known as the 'mouse catcher' (*muizenvanger*) for his habit of hunting mice, had attracted considerable attention from photographers, who reportedly fed him, causing him to lose his natural wariness of humans (RTV Drenthe, 2024). A witness who knew the wolf well and observed him daily in Oude Willem, Drenthe, reported last seeing him on 20 December 2023. His disappearance has never been explained, and experts consider poaching the most likely cause [W01, W06, W36]. Among photographers it is rumoured he was poisoned, which would be consistent with a witness report of a piece of meat found on a footpath in an area regularly frequented by the wolf [W01].

In 2024, a farmer in the Oude Willem area claimed to have shot and killed multiple wolves and was reportedly in possession of videos of young wolves he had killed [W45]. That same year or in 2025, a hunter in Wapse, Westerveld municipality, was reported to have killed a wolf and received €1,000 in payment from a farmer [W01]. In January 2025, rumours circulated that a wolf had been killed and its carcass burned in a fire barrel between Hollandscheveld and Moscou, Hoogeveen municipality in Drenthe [W53]. A livestock farmer in Beilen, Drenthe, was similarly reported to have shot and killed a wolf and burned its carcass in a fire barrel in 2023 or 2024; a comparable report involving a farmer in the same area was received in early 2026, suggesting this was not an isolated incident [W01]. In August/September 2025, a resident of Hollandscheveld, Drenthe, posted in the Facebook group *Geen wolf zoekt leden*, effectively admitting that wolves are being illegally killed in his area. To one user he wrote: "*It doesn't have to cost any money, you know. There are hunters who will do it in an instant. Just arrange it with the hunter and keep it quiet. Things will quieten down on their own*". To another user he wrote: *"Just quit talking about it and take measures against the wolf yourself. Where I live, they were there too, but they have been dealt with. Nobody talks about it — you just hear a shot sometimes. Everyone here knows it, but it is not discussed"*.

In mid-2025, following sighting alerts of a wolf near Garyp (Tytsjerksteradiel, Fryslân), local residents reported hearing that the wolf had been shot and killed by someone in the area [W01].

In the early autumn of 2025, a wolf that had killed a dog at a holiday park near Spier was reported to be no longer alive [W01]. Around the same time, a young wolf which had repeatedly approached pedestrians and their dogs in the Dwingelderveld — widely covered in local media — was reported by farmers in Dwingeloo to have been killed and buried [W01]. By March 2026, media reported that the wolf had not been seen for three months. Two experts had spent a week attempting to locate and radio-collar it, but found no trace of the animal and no DNA evidence of its continued presence (Messing, M., 2026). The combination of farmer testimony and the complete absence of any biological trace is consistent with the wolf having been killed.

In March 2026, the provincial authorities of Drenthe announced that the male wolf GW4890m — named "Bor" by animal welfare organisations — had been missing since 20 November 2025 (Molema, F., 2026). The province had designated Bor a 'problem wolf' and issued a shooting order following a series of wolf-proof

fence breaches in October and November 2025: one in Frederiksoord, two in Beilen, and one in Dwingeloo. The wolf was a descendant of the Drents-Friese Regio pack. Given the pattern of organised wolf hunts documented in this province, poaching cannot be ruled out as the cause of his disappearance.

A lame wolf filmed limping in the snow on 3 January 2026 in the forests around Sellingen, Groningen (Sellingerbossen) is reported to have since disappeared and is said to have been killed [W01]. The area remained active in the weeks that followed. On 20 February 2026, shortly after Geenwolf.com published a wolf sighting alert on its website and social media (Geen Wolf, 2026), a local resident observed three cars driving along a dirt path restricted to pedestrians in the Sellingen forest. Upon realising they had been seen, the vehicles left the area at high speed [W54].

In January 2026, a witness related that the Lauwersmeer area on the border of Fryslân and Groningen showed signs of possible wolf settlement, but activity ceased with no clear explanation [W45]. In February 2026, hunters were reported to be actively pursuing a wolf that had recently taken up residence in the Lauwersmeer area [W01].

Two further incidents are worth noting in this context. In early March 2026, a golden jackal was illegally killed in Jonkersvaart (Westerkwartier, Groningen), reportedly mistaken for a wolf [W01]. The shooting of a dog in Wapse on the evening of 30 January 2026 can be read in the same light. The dog, named Benji, was walking off-leash in a field just outside the village when its owner heard two shots and saw a vehicle nearby. Approaching the vehicle, she recognised a hunter from the village, who admitted he had shot a dog and drove off, adding: *"Why are you walking here, crazy bitch"* (NOS, 2026a).

The case attracted national media attention for several days. The chair of the Royal Dutch Hunting Association (Koninklijke Nederlandse Jagersvereniging, KNJV), Laurens Hoedemaker, stated publicly that the hunter held a licence to hunt foxes and believed he had shot a fox (RTV Drenthe, 2026). However, many hunters believe he was shooting at a wolf [W46, W48], a view supported by the fact that Benji was a large dog that resembled a wolf in appearance. The police launched an investigation, seizing the hunter's firearm, hunting licence, and phone, and exhumed the dog for autopsy. At the time of writing, in March 2026, the investigation was ongoing.

The wolf situation in Drenthe has drawn comment from Johan Derksen, a prominent television personality and co-host of *Vandaag Inside* — one of the most watched daily talk shows in the Netherlands — who lives in Drenthe. In an episode broadcast on 26 November 2025, Derksen stated that farmers in Drenthe are fed up and are taking matters into their own hands: *"They just shoot it"*. He acknowledged that this would not resolve the situation, as it is illegal and must be carried out covertly, adding: *"But the wolf freaks are also counting the wolves, and they will keep finding wolves missing"*. He then stated that he knows where the wolves are and that the show's editorial team is in possession of a video showing a wolf being shot dead (Vandaag Inside, 2025).

◂ The "mouse catcher" who disappeared without a trace in Oude Willem, December 2023.

▲ Screenshot of a video dated 11 December 2025 of the young wolf that followed pedestrians in Dwingelderveld and is said to have been killed. Source: Facebook.

▲ In September 2023, a wolf was believed to be roaming the streets of Harderwijk on the Veluwe. It later proved to be a dog. Source: 112harderwijk.nl/loslopende-wolf-in-harderwijk-blijkt-hond#pid=1

4.1.2

The Veluwe and central Netherlands (Gelderland, Overijssel, Utrecht)

This study identified 25 (suspected) persecution and poaching incidents in this region between October 2021 and January 2026, all but one of which occurred in Gelderland. A minimum of 24 wolves were killed in these incidents. The Veluwe — particularly the Noord-Veluwe around Nunspeet, Hulshorst, Elspeet and Doornspijk — emerges as the most heavily documented persecution hotspot in the Netherlands. The number of recorded incidents has increased sharply over time, from one in 2021 and three in 2022 to ten in 2025, reflecting both the expansion of wolf territories across the Veluwe and growing intensity of illegal activity (Figure 6). There appears to have been a particularly sharp 50% increase in incidents from 2024 to 2025. While the wolf population continues to increase, it is likely that the population is approaching ecological carrying capacity in the region, suggesting the increase in persecution and/or poaching incidents is not simply a direct response to an increasing wolf population. As data collection for this study halted in March 2026, it is to be expected that this trend will continue. The potential drivers of this increase are explored below.

Persecution of wolves

Several incidents document the deliberate pursuit of wolves using vehicles. In April 2023, wolf GW2937m (a descendant of the Belgian Hechtel-Eksel pack) was run over on the A12 motorway between Duiven and Zevenaar and subsequently chased by people on quads; the wolf had to be euthanised (Animal Rights, 2024). In September 2024, a man filmed himself attempting to run a wolf over as it crossed the Van Petersom Ramringweg in Nunspeet; the video was shared on the Facebook group Geen wolf and subsequently by NGO De Faunabescherming on X. The case prompted Staatsbosbeheer, a major nature management organisation in the Netherlands, to file a report against the driver (Showblad, 2024).

In January 2025, a video shared on social media showed a man and woman pursuing a wolf by car at high speed near Oene, Epe. As the wolf ran ahead of the vehicle the woman told the man: *“Don’t hit him, that would be a shame for my car”*, followed moments later by: *“A pity someone else doesn’t run him over”* (Omroep Gelderland, 2025). In June 2025, a large group of local residents from the Doornspijk area reportedly went out by car with the explicit aim of killing a wolf seen in the area [W44]. In September 2025, following the disappearance of Daisy — the sheepdog of a sheep herder in Epe-Heerde that was attacked by a wolf — people in large cars with roof-mounted spotlights and camouflage clothing were observed on several nights in the restricted Renderklippen area, which is closed to visitors after sunset. Wolf experts believe they were there to harm the wolf, rather than search for the dog [W48]. A witness residing in Heerde reported that local youths regularly go out by car at night with the explicit aim of killing wolves — and that this is common knowledge among residents in the area [W44].

In December 2025, a member of the Facebook group *Groep Wolf* reported that between Putten, Krachtighuizen and Voorthuizen *“people are speeding on purpose and going out in cars — including at night — after wolf sightings in the neighbourhood”*.

The area around Ermelo, Garderen, and the surrounding agricultural enclaves has witnessed multiple reports of wolves being chased by vehicles. Residents reportedly coordinate their wolf poaching and persecution activities through local app groups [W14].

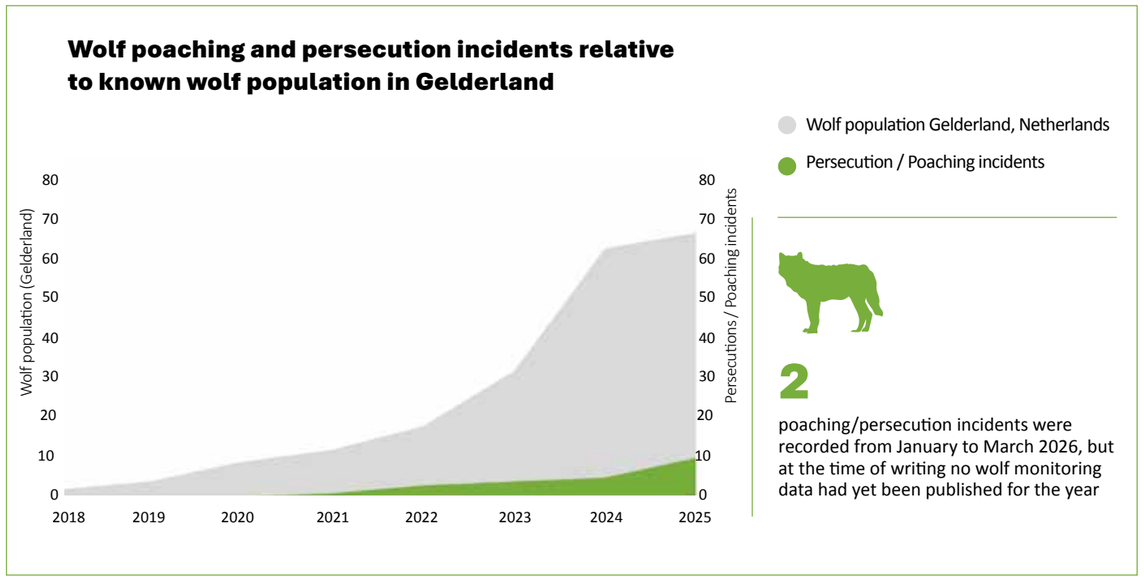


Figure 6 Number of poaching and persecution incidents recorded in the Veluwe and central Netherlands relative to the known wolf population in that region. The first wolf was observed in 2018, but the record of poaching and persecution incidents is from October 2021-December 2025.

(Suspected) poaching of wolves

Poaching incidents on the Veluwe are heavily concentrated in the northern Veluwe, particularly in and around the villages of Hulshorst, Nunspeet, Elspeet, and Doornspijk — a cluster of farming communities on the western edge of the Veluwe, where wolves regularly cross between forest and agricultural land. A second concentration of incidents is found in the central Veluwe, centred on the municipalities of Ede, Barneveld and Apeldoorn. Fewer incidents were recorded for the southern Veluwe, but the evidence — including the resident male of the Zuidwest Veluwe pack being poached in 2021 and the subsequent unexplained disappearance of several wolves of the same pack in 2024/2025 — indicates that persecution here is no less serious.

▲ Screenshot from video footage of a wolf being pursued by a car in Oene, Gelderland, January 2025. Source: Faunabescherming, https://x.com/faunabeschermin/status/1882687321860120787

Photo: Tirza Kerwijs

Photo: Dutch police.

Northern Veluwe

In September 2022, a dead wolf (GW2932m) was found west of the A50 motorway near Heerde; autopsy established the cause of death was not natural. The NGO Animal Rights offered a €5,000 reward for information on the perpetrator(s) and the police investigated, but no one was apprehended (De Stentor, 2022).

In 2022/2023, rumours circulated in the villages of Hulshorst and Hierden of farmers claiming they were killing wolves and disposing of the bodies in dung cellars or fire barrels [W03]. In October 2024, shots were fired at a pack of six to seven wolves at the Varelseweg in Hulshorst [W09]. Months later (late 2024/early 2025), a farmer from Hulshorst claimed he had shot a wolf [W03]. In the spring of 2025, a wolf had reportedly been killed and dumped in the Veluwemeer, near Hulshorst [W03]. In March 2025, a man told a witness in Nunspeet that he and a group of farmers had shot and killed a wolf, placed it in a pickup truck and burned it in an oil drum on a farmyard [W50].

Multiple witnesses have reported that wolves are being poached in the Elspeet and Doornspijk areas. A forest ranger told a witness that wolves are being poached near Elspeet [W12]. A resident of the northern Veluwe was told by someone from Hulshorst that local youth use a group app to alert each other when a wolf crosses the Leuvenumse Bos ecoduct heading towards agricultural land and then go out to run it over — adding that approximately 25 wolves had already been killed this way and dumped in the Veluwemeer [W17]. While the figure of 25 seems an exaggeration, the underlying claim of organised pursuit is consistent with other accounts.

In mid-2025, a hunter told a witness in Elspeet that it is common practice for people in the area to reach for an air rifle when they see a wolf on their property, adding: "This happens everywhere here" [W48]. A local business owner in Elspeet told a witness in December 2025: *"Yes, indeed, we all know that wolves are disappearing and often we also know who is responsible — but we don't talk about that"* [W41]. A resident of Elspeet overheard a conversation between a farmer and a hunter, both of whom he knew personally, in which the farmer stated: *"If a wolf comes onto my yard I will shoot it dead"* [W29].

In September 2025, a member of a local political party in Nunspeet told a resident that locals had killed a wolf [W19]. In October 2025, a birdwatcher near Hierden heard from a passerby that a wolf had been killed and set on fire near Nunspeet [W13]. Also in 2025, a hobby sheep owner from Nunspeet described to a witness how he and other local residents disposed of wolves: following a sighting alert, they go to the location as a group, shoot the animal and immediately bury it with a shovel. The same group had also monitored Ecoduct Hulshorst — the wildlife overpass connecting the Hulshorsterzand and Leuvenumse Bos on the northwest Veluwe with the agricultural communities bordering the Veluwemeer — in order to intercept wolves crossing into farmland [W09].

On 6 October 2025, forest rangers found the remains of a male wolf under suspicious circumstances in the Bloemkampen, a nature reserve managed by Natuurmonumenten bordering the Veluwe Randmeer, just north of Hulshorst. Forensic analysis has shown the wolf was GW2664m, the territorial male of the Noordwest Veluwe pack. GW2664m originated from the Barnstorf pack in Niedersaksen, Germany, and established a territory with GW2668f in 2022. Experts believe the wolf may have been killed intentionally and dumped there [W02, W16, W31].

This is corroborated by government documents obtained by Werkgroep Wolf Leusden through a Freedom of Information request (Wet open overheid, Woo). In email correspondence about the case, a forensic expert noted that the wolf's skull was fractured and suggested this might indicate a deliberate blow — possibly after the animal had been run over. The expert added that it seemed unlikely the animal had made it to that spot by itself. The attending police officer recorded in their report that the forest rangers informed them that locally *"an enormous hatred of the wolf is growing" and that they had already lost several other wolves*. The police declined to investigate, as the carcass was too far decayed to establish cause of death (Police report and associated correspondence, obtained by Werkgroep Wolf Leusden via Woo-request, 2025).

In November 2025, a woman posted on the Facebook group *Wolvenplatform Nederland* that she had read an account on a private page claiming several wolves had been "*put to sleep*" in the area around Doornspijk, just 4 kilometres northeast of Nunspeet.

Resistance against wolves is also evident in the area around Heerde, on the northeastern edge of the Veluwe. A resident stated that most people in the village say that if a wolf dares to walk through the village, they will get their hunting rifle from the attic and kill it. The same witness reported having heard in January 2025 that someone in the nearby village of Wapenveld had shot and killed a wolf [W44].

Central Veluwe

On 23 February 2022, a decomposed wolf carcass was found in the forests near Ugchelen, Apeldoorn. The carcass appeared to have been buried and subsequently excavated, most likely by wild boar. The police launched an investigation after indications emerged that the wolf — GW3154m, a descendant of the Noord Veluwe pack — had not died of natural causes. No one was apprehended and the case was never publicly identified as a poaching incident. However, a police report obtained by Werkgroep Wolf Leusden through a Freedom of Information request reveals that the investigating officer concluded poaching was the most plausible explanation, noting that the wolf had been buried and covered with sticks (Police report obtained by Werkgroep Wolf Leusden via Woo-request, 2026).

In August 2023, a man found the carcass of a young wolf near a knekelveld — a disposal site for wildlife carcasses — in the protected Kroondomein estate near Hoog Soeren, Apeldoorn. The police investigated but found no evidence of illegal activity. The incident is nonetheless recorded as suspicious, particularly given that a second carcass — this time of an adult wolf — was found at the same location in June 2024 (Werkgroep Wolf, 2024).

◂ Male yearling in Kroondomein, Veluwe, August 2024.

▴ Wolf carcass found in Boswachterij Ugchelen, 23 February 2022.

Photo: Arjen Heeres

> ***"...poachers shoot and kill every wolf, they get paid for it, the dead wolf is wrapped in sheeting to avoid detection and buried six feet deep in a meadow. Every resident of Kootwijkerbroek and surrounding area knows about it and everyone stays silent"***

In September 2023, a witness spoke to a sheep farmer from Wekerom who stated: *"We get rid of any wolf that comes near us"*, claiming that three or four wolves in his area had been killed and dumped in a manure pit [W23]. In January 2025, an anonymous witness saw a dead wolf hanging from a fence near Radio Kootwijk [W30]. In February 2025, a Facebook post by a writer from Barneveld stated: *"They should do like in Kootwijkerbroek — there poachers shoot and kill every wolf, they get paid for it, the dead wolf is wrapped in sheeting to avoid detection and buried six feet deep in a meadow. Every resident of Kootwijkerbroek and surrounding area knows about it and everyone stays silent"* [W09].

A wolf monitoring expert, interviewed in December 2025, stated that in recent years several wolves have disappeared on or near the ISK Harskamp military base, an area prohibited to wolf monitoring [W11]. This is consistent with a conversation a witness had with local residents in Harskamp in September 2023, in which they stated: "*We'll sort that ourselves*" [W23].

In January 2026, a Facebook user from Barneveld posted that wolves had been shot dead in her village on the Veluwe, adding that she had heard gunshots at night but that *"no one knows anything"*. On 11 January 2026, a dead wolf was found in the garden of a holiday home in Wissel, Epe, with injuries consistent with a traffic collision (De Stentor, 2026). However, the roads were covered in snow and ice at the time, preventing high-speed driving. Wolf experts widely considered the incident suspicious, noting that sighting alerts for four wolves in the area had been shared on social media the previous day [W14, W42, W44, W60].

Southern Veluwe

On 1 October 2021, the body of GW1490m — nicknamed Van Haaften — was found in a ditch alongside the Stroeërschoolweg in Stroe, Barneveld. Initially believed to be a traffic victim, ballistic analysis later established he had been shot — making him to date the only wolf in the Netherlands whose killing has been forensically confirmed. GW1490m had migrated from Germany in late 2020 and previously paired with GW1792f (Toska), a female who died in a traffic collision while pregnant with eight pups. Wolf experts believe he was killed near Otterlo in his territory Zuidwest Veluwe — where his DNA was found on killed sheep two days before his body was discovered — and his carcass subsequently dumped in Stroe. The police launched an investigation and NGO De Faunabescherming offered a reward of €16,000 for information, but no one came forward (NOS, 2021).

The Zuidwest Veluwe pack has continued to face persecution. In October 2025, Staatsbosbeheer forest ranger Frank Theunissen posted a 2024 video of the pack on Bluesky, noting that of the 19 wolves who made up the pack at the time of filming, only three remained in the territory. He listed road casualties, killing by other wolves, and dispersal as partial explanations, but added that not all disappearances could be accounted for: *"A number of them are explainable — killed by other wolves, hit by a car — but not all of them"* (Theunissen, F., 2025; personal communication, 2025).

Further evidence of wolves being hunted in this part of the Veluwe comes from a video shared on the Facebook page of No Wolves Benelux in September 2024, showing a wolf being shot at from a blue farmer's tractor near Ede — within the Zuidwest Veluwe pack's territory. The video was posted with the caption: *"Another one near Ede. The shot missed"* (No Wolves Benelux, 2024). The wolf escaped.

A wolf pack has been present in National Park De Hoge Veluwe since 2021. As the park owners — who are outspoken opponents of wolf presence in the park (National Park De Hoge Veluwe, n.d.) — do not allow wolf monitoring by BIJ12 and do not share the results of their own monitoring, it is unclear to what extent this pack may be affected by poaching. The park has gone to considerable lengths to exclude wolves, raising fences and, in 2019, unilaterally closing Ecoduct Oud-Reemst, a wildlife overpass across the N310 road connecting the park to Planken Wambuis, a nature reserve on the other side. The closure resulted in three wolf pups being killed while attempting to cross the N310 on 26 September 2024. It also constituted a violation of art. 3.5 paragraph 2 of the Environment and Planning Act (*Omgevingswet*), which prompted NGOs Animal Rights and De Faunabescherming to demand enforcement action from the Gelderland provincial authorities in April 2025. The park partially reopened the ecoduct in March 2026, a move that observers believe was made to pre-empt formal enforcement measures (Animal Rights, 2026).

Monitoring data

The monitoring data corroborates the picture painted by these witness accounts and open-source data. Of the 38 wolves that have disappeared without explanation from Dutch monitoring records, 19 were last detected in Gelderland — more than in any other province. Among them are four pups from the Noord-Veluwe pack (GW3239f, GW3879f, GW4007f, and GW1889m), all of which vanished without explanation from one of the most intensively monitored wolf territories in the Netherlands (see section 4.2).

Elsewhere in Gelderland (Betuwe and Achterhoek)

Wolf poaching is not restricted to the Veluwe.

On 11 April 2026, a witness reported that a video of a wolf being shot was circulating among local residents of Maurik, in the Betuwe region of Gelderland [W04]. The incident followed a wave of online hostility towards a wolf that had been sighted near the village. Several videos of the wolf were posted on the Facebook group *Wolvenmeldpunt Geen Wolf* and a local group, *Wolf in Maurik en omstreken*, on 24 and 25 March 2026, prompting calls from multiple users to run the wolf over or shoot it. On 26 March, a man posted an image of his drone with an offer of his services. Given that the shooting video was reported to be circulating by 11 April and the online hostility peaked on 24–26 March, the wolf appears to have been killed in the intervening period.

In December 2025, a Facebook user responded to a question about why there are no wolves in the Achterhoek (eastern Gelderland) by stating that all wolves there are killed and that this is what should happen everywhere: "*There the agreement is no wolves. Or only for a few days. That's what they should do everywhere. Shoot and get rid of them instantly. It is so simple to fix*" .

Overijssel

No suspected poaching incidents were recorded within the province of Overijssel. This does not mean, however, that wolves are not being killed here. Three wolves have disappeared after last being seen in Overijssel — in 2016, 2022 and 2024 respectively (see section 4.2). Multiple experts have noted that it is remarkable that wolves have so far failed to establish a territory in Overijssel, despite the province offering suitable habitat and being directly adjacent to the Nordhorn wolf pack territory just across the German border [W11, W37, W29].

The situation in the adjacent German border region reinforces these concerns. The Nordhorn/Klausheide pack, whose territory extends directly across the Dutch border into Twente, has experienced a turnover rate that experts consider inconsistent with natural population dynamics and strongly suggestive of systematic illegal removal [W11, W18]. Between 2020 and 2022, an entire pack of thirteen wolves reportedly disappeared from the area according to witnesses with direct knowledge of the region [W11, W18]. A new pair successfully established itself in Nordhorn in 2022/2023, but no pups were recorded in that year or in 2023/2024 (Wolfsmonitoring.com, n.d.), a pattern that further supports the conclusion that poaching in this border area is both persistent and organised.

> ***"If I am sitting in my high seat and have a wolf in sight, I will shoot it"***

◂ Wolf, Zuidwest Veluwe.

“He said ‘we’ll handle that ourselves’. I asked how do you get rid of wolves? He said: ‘Fell a tree, place the wolf underneath — you’ll never hear about it again’”

Attitudes and culture of silence

Witness accounts paint a consistent picture of deeply embedded anti-wolf sentiment in Overijssel, and in the Twente region in particular. Wildlife poaching is described by multiple witnesses as an age-old tradition in this province, which is also known as a hotspot for badger persecution and the illegal killing of birds of prey [W11, W18]. The Twente region, bordering Germany in the east, is specifically identified as a place where a culture of silence around poaching and other illicit activities is deeply entrenched.

A witness residing in Overijssel stated that several hunters had told him directly: *“If I am sitting in my high seat and have a wolf in sight, I will shoot it”*, adding: *“No one finds out because it is not talked about. It’s a small world. You won’t find out who does it”* [W18].

Another witness with extensive knowledge of the hunting community in Twente described the underlying dynamic in detail [W29]: *“There are plenty of people in Twente who own a rifle and live in the countryside. As far as poaching goes, there is not that much left to take, but they hold onto that weapon. And if a neighbour has a problem, they go and help him as a matter of neighbourly duty — they’ll sort it out. It’ll be fine. And it is not talked about — you will find it very hard to hear about. So you won’t find out easily.”* [W29]. The same witness recounted a conversation he had with a gamekeeper in Twente about wolves: *“He said ‘we’ll handle that ourselves’. I asked how do you get rid of wolves? He said: ‘Fell a tree, place the wolf underneath — you’ll never hear about it again’”* [W29].

Another witness, with direct knowledge of the hunting community across multiple provinces, described the culture in stark terms [W43]: *“When it comes to wolves, it comes down to hunting rights holders and hunters. Particularly in Twente, the Achterhoek, Brabant, Limburg — there is a real culture there, especially among the older generation but also the younger one. It is not talked about. Yes, we sort it out ourselves. But everyone is always afraid to name names. It is very Twente, I think. Everyone is afraid for their own skin. If you are invited as a hunter to another hunter’s place and you see things happen, you don’t dare say anything because you want to be invited again next year. It is very dirty, very wrong. These are people who live for hunting. They will do a great deal to keep hunting — they vote for entirely wrong parties like Forum voor Democratie (FVD, Forum for Democracy, a far-right political party in the Netherlands) because they are pro-hunting. That says a great deal about how these people think.”* [W43].

Central to this culture is the concept of *noaberschap* — a traditional norm of neighbourly duty prevalent in Twente, the Achterhoek and Drenthe — which witnesses describe as being invoked to justify illegal acts: if a neighbour has a problem with a wolf, others will quietly resolve it on their behalf. The wolf is also widely viewed as a competitor for game, and for hunters whose identity and social life revolve around hunting, its presence is experienced as an existential threat. Several witnesses noted that the wolf is additionally perceived as a symbol of unwanted interference from central government — a “foreign element” imposed by the urban west — making its illegal removal an act of defiance as much as a practical measure [W10, W17, W29, W36, W39, W43, W45].

This culture finds open expression on social media. In September 2025, a woman posted on the Facebook group Geen wolf zoekt leden: *“We live in Denekamp (Twente) — it’s totally quiet here re: the wolf. Here they are smarter… don’t 🧐 ”*. On 29 November 2025, a retired veterinarian from Zwolle posted three times in quick succession on a Facebook group, responding to a user who said that wolves would sooner or later start disappearing: *“It’s happening already”*, followed by “*it’s happening, but it should be official”*, and finally *“At the next attack I would lie in wait”*. In October 2025, an entrepreneur from Vasse, Twente, made the following comment regarding a discussion on wolves on LinkedIn: “*By the time you have finished debating, the number of wolves and the nuisance they cause will have doubled. That is why we in Twente have come up with our own solution, and wolves hardly occur here anymore. Much safer for our livestock, the wildlife and the children.”*. Another person, apparently also from Twente given the dialect he used responded: “*Often you are too scared. Get rid of it*”.

Utrecht

Utrecht province currently has one wolf pack, the Utrechtse Heuvelrug pack, named after the nature area where it is established. Information from witnesses provide indications that the pack (and/or any vagrant wolves present or passing through) may be at risk of poaching.
In March 2024, a witness reported a conversation in a WhatsApp group among horse owners at a riding centre in Leersum, known to be strongly anti-wolf. The conversation concerned a wolf that had been seen near the stables. One member wrote: *“This wolf is no longer”*. The wolf had been frequently observed in the area before this exchange; it has not been seen since [W09].

Several reports were received about pieces of meat found within the pack’s territory. In February 2025, a hiker found pieces of salami in the forest on the border of Den Treek estate, Leusderheide and the Utrechtse Heuvelrug nature reserve. The salami had an unusual smell; the witness removed it and handed it to a local forest ranger. It remains unclear whether the salami had been laced with poison [W04, W59]. A further witness reported that a dog owner had found pieces of tripe near the Maarnse Berg on several occasions and at multiple locations and had observed individuals in the area who appeared to have no obvious reason to be there. It was unclear whether the meat had been left by wildlife photographers or whether it had been poisoned [W60]. In January 2025, the Volkskrant reported that recent camera footage had shown five wolves present in the pack’s territory, noting that the pack had originally consisted of seven members, one of which had died in a traffic collision — suggesting one member was unaccounted for (Geelen, J.P., 2025). This is consistent with the monitoring data, which show that one pup of the pack, GW4415m, has not been recorded since its DNA was identified in an attack on six sheep in Doorn in November 2024 (see section 4.2).

The pack lost its breeding male, GW3237m — also known as Bram — in December 2025, when he was shot dead on the order of the province following a series of human-wolf incidents in 2024 and 2025, including biting a female hiker, knocking over a small girl, and attacking a young boy. Bram was the first wolf to be legally killed in the Netherlands under a problem wolf designation (NOS, 2025). Within days, a new male had taken his place — a collared wolf that had come from National Park De Hoge Veluwe and covered approximately 2,500 km through Overijssel and Drenthe before arriving in Utrecht (Hart van Nederland, 2026a).

“We live in Denekamp (Twente) — it’s totally quiet here re: the wolf. Here they are smarter… don’t 🧐 ”

▲ Wolf Van Haaften (GW1490m) found dead in a ditch in Stroe with bullets in his body. Screenshot taken from video Opsporing Verzocht 16 November 2021: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulciW2Ng1mo

4.1.3

Southern Netherlands (Noord-Brabant, Zeeland, Limburg)

Two suspected poaching incidents were recorded for Noord-Brabant and one for Zeeland, concerning three wolves that disappeared under suspicious circumstances.

Noord-Brabant, and to a lesser extent Zeeland and Limburg, offer suitable habitat for wolves (Biersteker et al., 2024). Yet to date, several attempts by wolves to establish territories in Noord-Brabant have failed. Witness testimony provides insight into three such attempts, all of which ended in the wolf disappearing without trace.

In 2021, a male wolf (GW1954m, also known as Klaas), originating from the Belgian Hechtel-Eksel pack, arrived in the region. In December 2021 he was sighted in Zeeland, crossing Schouwen-Duiveland to Scharendijke before returning to Noord-Brabant. His DNA was last confirmed after a sheep attack in Rilland, Zeeland, on 18 March 2022. Members of a shooting club in 's-Gravenpolder reportedly commented that the wolf had been buried in the ground and would not be seen again [W61]. A witness stated that farmers and hunters in Zeeland are strongly opposed to the presence of wolves and that as soon as a wolf enters the province, "a bomb of panic" ensues [W61]. A wolf monitoring expert observed that wolves entering Zeeland appear to be on a "*one-way trip*", almost invariably disappearing upon arrival, according to monitoring data analysis [W11].

Also in 2021, a male wolf (GW1625m) — the first wolf to reach the Netherlands from the French-Italian Alpine population — established a territory in Groote Heide, a nature reserve in the east of Noord-Brabant bordering Limburg. He frequently attacked sheep, fuelling anti-wolf sentiment, yet local farmers consistently refused to implement protective measures for their livestock. He made a brief trip to Germany in 2022, but returned to Groote Heide. In July 2023 he disappeared; local forest rangers believe he was killed [W61].


Photo: Erik de Jonge

A wolf monitoring expert observed that wolves entering Zeeland appear to be on a *"one-way trip"*, almost invariably disappearing upon arrival

◂ The female wolf (GW4097f) who is believed to have been poached in/near her territory in Markiezaat.

In early 2024, a female wolf (GW4097f), originating from the Belgian Hoge Venen pack and having previously been recorded in Germany, settled in the Markiezaat nature reserve on the border of Noord-Brabant and Zeeland. Between June and August 2024, she attacked a flock of sheep near Rilland, Zeeland, on several occasions (BIJ12, n.d.b, Omroep Zeeland, 2024). The sheep farmer made multiple media appearances to voice his opposition to the wolf (Telegraaf, 2024), and members of No Wolves Benelux came to the scene with banners and guarded the flock for several nights as a public demonstration. The farmer refused to install wolf-proof fencing. The wolf disappeared shortly afterwards, last being seen in the reserve in December 2024. Wolf experts are certain she was killed [W61]. In the weeks leading up to her disappearance, hunters had been observed on several nights at the edge of the Markiezaat, scanning the reserve with night vision equipment [W61].

Monitoring data corroborate the witness testimonies discussed above. Between November 2020 and September 2024, four wolves disappeared in Noord-Brabant and one in Zeeland (see section 4.2).

Social media research provides further indications of wolf poaching in the southern Netherlands. In April 2024, a user posted on X during a discussion about wolves: *"In Zeeland they have recently shot one. Everyone knows who did it but everyone is silent"*. In 2025, a resident of Tegelen, Limburg, who appears to be a hunter based on his wider social media activity, made a series of comments on the Facebook page *Geen wolf in cultuurlandschap* that suggest knowledge of and possible involvement in wolf poaching. In January 2025, he posted: *"Damn, I am furious. Sort it out yourself, for God's sake.... [get rid of] that vermin"* — the incomplete sentence appearing to deliberately omit the verb to avoid being explicit. In May 2025 he exclaimed: *"I'll handle it myself")*. In November 2025 he wrote: *"Have been disappearing here for months. Speaking is silver. Silence is golden"* . His attitude toward wolves is illustrated by a photograph he posted on his personal Facebook page in December 2024, showing a dead wolf with a firearm placed on its body. The location where the wolf was killed is unknown.

▲ Image of dead wolf with hunting rifle posted by a hunter from Limburg on his FB page.

Photo: Arjen Heeres

4.2

The missing wolves: what monitoring data reveals

Concerns about wolves disappearing without explanation in the Netherlands are not new. In January 2025, *de Volkskrant* — one of the Netherlands' leading national newspapers — published an investigation in which seven ecologists and wolf experts were consulted, several of whom expressed serious concern that wolves were being lost to poaching. "*The wolf is observed so frequently in the densely populated Netherlands that it is hard for us to miss one,*" one expert told the newspaper. "*It is virtually impossible that a wolf suddenly goes undetected for more than a few months — including abroad. That you never find any trace of it again is virtually impossible*". Another expert identified the Veluwe, Gelderland, as a region of particular concern and suggested that poaching, after traffic accidents and conflict between wolves, may be the most important cause of wolf mortality in the Netherlands: "*We cannot prove it, but given how many wolves are disappearing and how much resistance there is to the animal, I cannot see why it would be any different in the Netherlands than in surrounding countries*" (Geelen, J.P., 2025).

The monitoring data examined for this report substantiates these concerns. Of the 259 wolves whose DNA has been recorded in the Netherlands between 2015 and December 2025, 38 — just over 14.7% — have not been detected for more than six months in the Netherlands or elsewhere in Europe and are therefore classified as having disappeared, following the methodology of Jansman et al. (2021). The number of disappearances has increased markedly over time: one wolf disappeared before 2020, compared with six in 2022, fifteen in 2023, and ten in 2024, broadly tracking the growth of the wolf population but also suggesting a worsening trend.

	Province	Wolf disappearances
1st	Gelderland	19
2nd	Drenthe	8
3rd	Noord-Brabant	4
4th	Overijssel	3
5th	Fryslân	1
6th	Limburg	1
7th	Utrecht	1
8th	Zeeland	1

The 38 wolves were last detected across eight provinces. Gelderland recorded the highest number of disappearances (19), followed by Drenthe (8), Noord-Brabant (4), Overijssel (3), Fryslân (1), Limburg (1), Utrecht (1), and Zeeland (1). The concentration in Gelderland — particularly the Veluwe region, where 16 of the 38 wolves were last recorded — is notable and consistent with the pattern of persecution activity documented elsewhere in this report. Of the 38 disappeared wolves, 17 originated from established Dutch packs, including nine from Veluwe packs alone. Four wolves originated from Germany; three from Belgium; two from the French Italian Alpine population, twelve had an unknown origin.

Not all 38 disappearances can be assumed to be the result of poachwing. It is possible that some wolves — particularly dispersing individuals crossing international borders — may have died of natural causes or moved beyond the reach of monitoring networks.

Furthermore, the figure of 38 disappeared wolves is itself likely to be an underestimate. It is derived exclusively from wolves whose DNA has been recorded in the Netherlands — but an unknown number of wolves pass through or settle in the country without ever being genetically identified. This is partly a consequence of how monitoring is structured: it focuses primarily on confirming the presence of resident wolves, meaning dispersing individuals may go entirely undetected. The DNA identification policy for livestock damage compounds this further. Individual-level identification is only carried out systematically outside known wolf territories and within territories where livestock protection meets the advisory standard.

>14%

of dna monitored wolves' have not been detected for more than six months in the Netherlands or elsewhere in Europe and are therefore classified as having disappeared between 2015 and December 2025

◂ Wolf, Zuidwest Veluwe.

Photo: Luc Mongenstein

Within territories where protection falls short — which, given that an estimated 90% of livestock remains unprotected, covers the large majority of damage incidents — individual identification is only conducted when data on resident wolves is considered insufficient. Wolves killed before their DNA is ever recorded will not appear in any disappearance analysis. In other words, we are counting only the wolves we know about — and we do not know about all of them.

What is clear, however, is that the wolves we do know about are disappearing at a rate that is difficult to explain without invoking human-caused mortality. The available evidence from comparable wolf populations in Europe suggests that natural mortality alone cannot account for disappearance rates of this magnitude.

Liberg et al. (2012), in their landmark study of the Scandinavian wolf population, estimated that poaching accounted for approximately half of total mortality and more than two-thirds of total poaching was cryptic — that is, caused by illegal killing that went undetected by conventional monitoring. Using genetic identification in a largely closed population, they demonstrated that the majority of disappeared wolves had been illegally killed rather than having emigrated or died of natural causes.

The pattern is consistent with findings from the Jutland peninsula, where Sunde et al. (2021) found that cryptic mortality dominated wolf disappearances in a similarly densely populated and heavily cultivated landscape, and concluded that frequent encounters between wolves and wolf-averse persecutors in such landscapes may cause unsustainably high mortality rates even where most people respect protection laws. In Poland, Nowak et al. (2021) documented 91 confirmed cases of illegal wolf killing — 54 by shooting and 37 by snaring — between 2002 and 2020, with nearly two-thirds of those occurring in the final four years of the study period, pointing to a rapidly worsening trend of persecution as the wolf population expanded westward. In Italy, a study of wolf mortality in Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna found that of 179 confirmed human-caused wolf deaths recorded between 2005 and 2021, 41.9% were the result of illegal killing (Musto et al., 2021).

Applied to the Dutch context, these findings lend considerable weight to the hypothesis that a substantial proportion of the 38 disappeared wolves were illegally killed. The geographic concentration of disappearances in the Veluwe and Drenthe — precisely the areas where organised persecution activity has been most extensively documented in this report — reinforces this interpretation. While it cannot be stated with certainty that any individual disappearance was the result of poaching, the pattern of where and when these wolves vanished is difficult to explain on the basis of natural mortality or emigration alone. The 38 disappeared wolves should therefore be considered a conservative lower-bound estimate of the likely scale of cryptic poaching in the Netherlands over the period studied.

Cross-referencing the list of 38 disappeared wolves against the witness testimony and open-source data gathered for this report yields three cases in which a wolf's disappearance from monitoring records coincides directly with a witness-reported poaching incident for the same individual. Wolf GW1954m ("Klaas"), whose DNA was last recorded on 18 March 2022 following a sheep attack in Rilland, Zeeland, is the subject of a witness report from the same date and location in which a member of a local shooting association stated that this wolf "*won't be seen again and that it is buried somewhere.*" Wolf GW1625m, which disappeared from monitoring records in July 2023 after settling in De Groote Heide in Noord-Brabant and killing at least 97 sheep, is the subject of a witness report stating that he "*suddenly disappeared in July 2023 and it is believed he was poached.*" Wolf GW4097f, a female wolf who settled in the Markiezaat nature reserve in 2024 and disappeared in December of that year, is the subject of a witness report noting that hunters had been observed at night in the area — where hunting is prohibited — in the period preceding her disappearance, and that witnesses believe she was shot. In each case, monitoring data and witness testimony independently converge on the same wolf, at the same time, in the same location — the closest possible corroboration short of a recovered carcass.

Beyond these three individually matched cases, the data reveal a broader pattern of circumstantial convergence between wolf disappearances and witness-reported poaching activity that is difficult to explain on any other basis. On the Veluwe, multiple pups from the Noord Veluwe pack disappeared in the summer and autumn of 2023 — GW3156m, GW3239f and GW3879f — coinciding with rumours from the same period circulating in Hulshorst and Hierden of farmers killing wolves and disposing of their carcasses in dung cellars and fire barrels and witness reports of wolves being killed and dumped in manure pits in the Midden Veluwe area. Five further pups from three Veluwe packs disappeared in autumn and winter 2024 — GW4603f and GW4604f (Noordwest Veluwe), GW4605m (Zuidwest Veluwe), and GW4699f and GW4700m (Midden-Veluwe) — coinciding with reports in early 2025 of a farmer in Hulshorst claiming to have shot a wolf, a wolf killed and dumped in the Veluwemeer, and organised vehicle patrols with spotlights in the Renderklippen area.

In Drenthe, eight wolves disappeared between 2018 and 2024, including Midden-Drenthe pack pups GW3877m (November 2023) and GW3881m (April 2024). These coincide with witness reports of a farmer in Beilen shooting and burning a wolf in a fire barrel, a farmer in the Oude Willem area claiming to have killed wolves, and a hunter in Wapse reportedly paid €1,000 for killing a wolf. Confidential sources identified the Wapse-Diever-Vledder triangle as a particular poaching hotspot. In Utrecht, GW4415m — a Utrechtse Heuvelrug pack pup who disappeared in November 2024 — is linked circumstantially to two incidents recorded in the same area in early 2025: suspected poisoned meat found in the forest near Leusderheide, and a WhatsApp group associated with a local horse riding centre in Leersum discussing a wolf that was allegedy killed in the area.

In none of these cases can individual disappeared wolves be directly linked to specific poaching incidents, as perpetrators have concealed carcasses. However, the repeated temporal and geographic convergence of disappearances and poaching reports across multiple provinces, pack territories and years is consistent with systematic persecution and difficult to attribute to natural mortality or emigration alone.

91

confirmed cases of illegal wolf killing — 54 by shooting and 37 by snaring — in Poland between 2002 and 2020

50%

of wolf mortality in Scandinavia was poaching, of which two-thirds was cryptic

◂ Wolves in German wildlife park.

Nr.	Wolf ID	Last seen	Province	Last known location	Origin	Notes
1	GW620f	03/09/2016	Overijssel	Losser	Ueckermünde (DE)	One of the first wolves genetically identified in the Netherlands. Scat found in Losser, Overijssel (Sep 2016), approximately 600 km from her birth pack. Disappeared without trace.
2	GW849f (Janka)	29/03/2019	Drenthe	Hooghalen, Midden-Drenthe	Ueckermünde (DE)	Born 2018, Ueckermünde Heide pack, Germany (700+ km away). Crossed into NL near Emmen on 24 March 2019. Transmitter lost signal on 25 March. DNA detected once on sheep in Hooghalen (29 March). Never found again — remarkable given her distinctive collar.
3	GW953m	31/03/2018	Drenthe	Sellingen, Westerwolde	Unknown (DE)	Origin unknown, came from Germany. Roamed Overijssel and Drenthe in March 2018, attacking sheep. Not seen since 31 March 2018.
4	GW955m	23/02/2018	Gelderland	Putten	Barnstorf (DE)	Entered NL from Germany in February 2018. Sighted across the Betuwe, Bennekom, Veenendaal and Amersfoort. Filmed crossing the A28 near Putten. Reached the northern Veluwe but has not been seen since.
5	GW1625m	09/07/2023	Noord-Brabant	Heeze, Heeze-Leende	Alpine pop. (FR)	First wolf to reach NL from the French-Italian Alps. DNA first identified April 2020. Established territory in De Groote Heide (N-Brabant/Limburg border); killed at least 97 sheep. After a brief trip to Germany (2022), returned to NL. Not seen since July 2023.
6	GW1889m	29/01/2023	Gelderland	Apeldoorn, Zuidoost-Veluwe	Noord Veluwe	Born in the Noord-Veluwe pack (2019/2020). Settled in Zuidoost-Veluwe in spring 2022, pairing with GW2363f. Not observed since 29 January 2023. His place was later taken by GW2563m.
7	GW1920m	29/11/2020	Noord-Brabant	's-Hertogenbosch	Alpine pop. (FR)	Second wolf to reach NL from the French-Italian Alps. First identified via sheep attack near Afferden (Limburg, Nov 2020). DNA then detected in Empel and Rosmalen. Not seen since end of November 2020.
8	GW1954m (Klaas)	18/03/2022	Zeeland	Rilland, Reimerswaal	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	Descendant of the Belgian Hechtel-Eksel pack. Sighted in Zeeland (Dec 2021), crossing Schouwen-Duiveland to Scharendijke before returning to N-Brabant. DNA last confirmed after a sheep attack in Rilland, Zeeland (18 March 2022). Not seen since.
9	GW2088m	14/02/2021	Gelderland	Ede, Zuidwest-Veluwe	Noord Veluwe	Descendant of the Noord-Veluwe pack. DNA confirmed via scat, wild prey and sheep attack (Feb–Apr 2021). Missing since 14 February 2021.
10	GW2670f	31/05/2022	Drenthe	Amen, Aa en Hunze	Unknown	First identified in Apeldoorn (Oct 2021). Attacked livestock in Drenthe and Groningen (Apr–May 2022). Not seen since her last attack in Amen on 31 May 2022.
11	GW2902f	17/10/2022	Overijssel	Tubbergen	Scheeßel (DE)	Descendant of the Scheessel pack, Lower Saxony (200+ km from NL border). First identified in NL (Twenterand, Jul 2022). Nine sheep attacks in northeast Twente (Jul–Oct 2022). Missing since 17 October 2022.
12	GW2903m	08/07/2022	Gelderland	Apeldoorn, Midden-Veluwe	Unknown	DNA identified via faeces in the Midden-Veluwe (July 2022). Not seen since. Origin unknown.
13	GW2904m	13/07/2022	Drenthe	Doldersum, Westerveld	Unknown (DE)	Origin unknown, came from Germany. Killed 7 sheep near Doldersum on 13 July 2022. Not identified since.
14	GW2935m	23/04/2023	Limburg	Ysselsteyn, Venray	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	Pup from the Hechtel-Eksel pack, Flanders. DNA found on attacked sheep near Ysselsteyn (23 April 2023). Missing since then.
15	GW3149m	09/11/2022	Gelderland	Winterswijk	Unknown	First detected in Winterswijk (9 Nov 2022) after killing a sheep. Disappeared immediately after. Origin unknown.
16	GW3150m	30/11/2022	Gelderland	Voorst	Unknown (DE)	Came from Germany, pack unknown. DNA detected near Voorst after attacking three sheep (30 Nov 2022). Not seen since.
17	GW3156m	22/08/2023	Gelderland	Nunspeet	Noord Veluwe	Pup from the Noord-Veluwe pack. DNA first identified December 2022. Faeces studied by Leiden University in 2023. Not identified since August 2023.
18	GW3239f	22/06/2023	Gelderland	Nunspeet	Noord Veluwe	Pup from the Noord-Veluwe pack. DNA detected via faeces in February and June 2023 — the only pup confirmed that year. Not seen since 22 June 2023.
19	GW3240m	25/04/2023	Gelderland	Laren, Lochem	Unknown	DNA detected in one sheep attack in Laren (April 2023) — first and only time. Missing since. Pack origin unknown.
20	GW3241f	21/02/2023	Gelderland	Barneveld	Unknown	DNA detected once via faeces on the western edge of the Noord-Veluwe (Feb 2023). Not linked to livestock attacks. Not seen since. Origin unknown.
21	GW3242f	15/03/2023	Drenthe	Schoonebeek, Emmen	Unknown	DNA identified in one livestock attack near Schoonebeek (15 March 2023). Missing since then. Origin unknown.
22	GW3618m	30/05/2023	Drenthe	Midden-Drenthe	Unknown	Genetically confirmed via faeces in May 2023. Not seen since. Pack origin unknown.
23	GW3810f	23/10/2023	Noord-Brabant	Sint Anthonis, Land van Cuijk	Unknown	Attacked four sheep in Sint Anthonis (23 Oct 2023). Origin unknown. Missing since then.
24	GW3812m	05/04/2024	Overijssel	Kallenkote, Steenwijkerland	Drents-Friese Regio	Pup of the Drents-Friese Regio pack. Involved in 23 sheep attacks across Drenthe, Fryslân and Overijssel (Nov 2023–Apr 2024). Missing since then.
25	GW3877m	27/11/2023	Drenthe	Midden-Drenthe	Midden-Drenthe	Pup from the Midden-Drenthe pack. DNA confirmed November 2023. Missing since then.
26	GW3879f	05/11/2023	Gelderland	Epe	Noord Veluwe	Pup of the Noord-Veluwe pack. DNA determined once via droppings (5 Nov 2023). Not identified since.
27	GW3880m	19/11/2023	Gelderland	Ede	Unknown	Identified once via scat in Gelderland (November 2023). Not seen since. Pack origin unknown.
28	GW3881m	08/04/2024	Drenthe	Amen, Aa en Hunze	Midden-Drenthe	Pup from the Midden-Drenthe pack. Involved in 14 sheep attacks in Drenthe (Dec 2023–Apr 2024). Missing since then.
29	GW4006m	01/01/2024	Gelderland	Noordwest Veluwe	Noordwest Veluwe	Pup from the Noordwest-Veluwe pack. Genetically confirmed once in January 2024. Missing since then.
30	GW4007f	03/01/2025	Gelderland	Apeldoorn	Noord Veluwe	Pup of the Noord-Veluwe pack. DNA confirmed in February 2024 and again on 3 January 2025. Missing since then.
31	GW4010f	20/12/2023	Fryslân	Makkinga, Ooststellingwerf	Drents-Friese Regio	Pup from the Drents-Friese Regio pack. Implicated in a sheep attack in Makkinga. Missing since then.
32	GW4097f	20/09/2024	Noord-Brabant	Bergen op Zoom / Rilland	Hoge Venen (BE)	Solitary female from the Hoge Venen pack, Wallonia. DNA detected in Germany (May 2024), then settled in Markiezaat reserve (Zeeland/N-Brabant border). Attacked unprotected sheep seven times near Rilland (Jun–Aug 2024). Last confirmed via dropping on 20 September 2024; last seen on camera 10 December 2024. Missing since.
33	GW4415m	17/11/2024	Utrecht	Doorn, Utrechtse Heuvelrug	Utrechtse Heuvelrug	Pup from the Utrechtse Heuvelrug pack. DNA confirmed during a sheep attack in Doorn (17 Nov 2024). Not seen since.
34	GW4603f	09/11/2024	Gelderland	Ermelo	Noordwest Veluwe	Descendant of the Noordwest-Veluwe pack, born 2024. DNA confirmed November 2024 alongside her sister GW4604f. Not identified since.
35	GW4604f	09/11/2024	Gelderland	Ermelo	Noordwest Veluwe	Descendant of the Noordwest-Veluwe pack, born 2024. DNA confirmed November 2024 alongside her sister GW4603f. Not identified since.
36	GW4605m	15/11/2024	Gelderland	Otterlo, Ede	Zuidwest Veluwe	Pup from the Zuidwest-Veluwe pack. DNA identified from a sheep attack near Otterlo. Not seen since.
37	GW4699f	15/12/2024	Gelderland	Apeldoorn, Midden-Veluwe	Midden-Veluwe	Pup of the Midden-Veluwe pack. DNA confirmed twice via droppings (Nov–Dec 2024). Missing since 15 December 2024.
38	GW4700m	01/10/2024	Gelderland	Midden-Veluwe	Midden-Veluwe	Pup from the Midden-Veluwe pack. DNA confirmed October 2024. Not seen since.

Table 2: Wolves that have disappeared from monitoring records in the Netherlands (2016–2025)
Wolves classified as disappeared: DNA not detected for more than six months in the Netherlands or elsewhere in Europe. Sorted by GW number (lowest to highest). Methodology following Jansman et al. (2021).le]

Photo: Arjen Heeres

4.3

Who kills wolves in the Netherlands

The incidents described in section 4.1 point strongly to farmers and hunters as the main perpetrators of wolf poaching and persecution in the Netherlands. This section examines these two groups in detail, drawing on witness testimony, social media research and open-source information.
A note on the boundary between these two groups is warranted. In the Netherlands, a significant proportion of farmers hold a hunting licence and regularly hunt on their own land or in their immediate area, meaning that the distinction between farmer and hunter is not always meaningful in practice. Others do not hold a licence but attempt to shoot wolves themselves with a PCP (Pre-charged Pneumatic) air rifle or rely on local hunters to act on their behalf. The two subsections that follow reflect the categories used by witnesses and in open sources, while recognising that the boundary between them is permeable.

4.3.1

Farmers

Farmers are implicated in a substantial number of poaching and persecution incidents documented in this study. Multiple witnesses across Drenthe and the Veluwe reported farmers shooting wolves and disposing of carcasses in fire barrels or manure pits, and several farmers made direct admissions — to witnesses, on social media, or in person.

In October 2022, a farmer in Fluitenberg, Drenthe, made headlines when he dumped the carcass of his goat killed by a wolf on the steps of the Drenthe provincial government building in protest. He told journalists that upon discovering the dead goat he had gone out and deliberately rammed the wolf with his vehicle, injuring it. He felt the wolf was the last straw: livestock was being taken, farmers were simultaneously facing the nitrogen crisis and pressure to restructure their businesses, while policymakers in The Hague appeared indifferent (RTV Drenthe, 2022).

Farmers have grown increasingly open about taking matters into their own hands. In May 2023, at a meeting with the Drenthe province wolf commission, a sheep farmer from Hijken stated plainly: "*Farmers are acquiring weapons to hunt the wolf themselves*" (Steenwijker Courant, 2023). In December 2025, at a demonstration in Barneveld, Gelderland, organised by action group Wolven Weg, a farmer from Gelderland told a journalist that people in rural areas are used to fixing problems if needed: "*That is not a threat. But if the mood deteriorates further, we will head towards manhunts like those we saw in the nineteenth century when the last wolf in the Netherlands was shot. We must try to avoid that*" (Telegraaf, 2025).

The scale and openness of farmer involvement was illustrated most starkly on national television on 26 November 2025, when Johan Derksen — a prominent co-host of *Vandaag Inside* and a resident of Drenthe — stated that farmers in the province are shooting wolves and disposing of them covertly, adding that his show's editorial team holds a video of a wolf being shot dead (Vandaag Inside, 2025).

The fact that a national television personality can openly discuss wolf poaching — including the existence of video evidence of a wolf being shot — without any apparent repercussion speaks volumes. It suggests that within certain communities, killing wolves is not experienced as a crime, but as a legitimate, if legally inconvenient, response to a problem that government has failed to solve. This normalisation is visible across the incidents documented in this study: farmers speak about shooting wolves to witnesses they have just met, admissions circulate freely in local WhatsApp groups and Facebook comments, and rural residents describe a shared understanding that wolves are being killed and that no one will say anything about it. The local business owner from Elspeet who told a witness that "*people in Elspeet all know who is responsible, but stay silent*" was not describing an exception — he was describing a social norm [W29].

In some areas, livestock owners who install wolf-proof fencing are considered traitors and subjected to pressure from other farmers who view protective measures as capitulating to government policy and the promotion of coexistence [W01, W17, W34, W35, W61]. This culture of social control extends beyond local communities. A farmer in Zeeland who had endured several wolf attacks on his unprotected sheep and was considering installing fencing received calls from farmers on the Veluwe urging him not to do so, on the grounds that it would imply acceptance of the wolf's presence. They advised him instead to maximise media coverage of any attack, in order to build public pressure for culling [W61]. In the northeastern Netherlands, it has been reported that some farmers have gone further still, sabotaging wolf-proof fences installed by other farmers in order to demonstrate that such fences are ineffective in keeping wolves out [W01]. If confirmed, this would represent not merely social pressure, but the deliberate undermining of the protective measures at the heart of Dutch wolf coexistence policy.

>14%

have not been detected for more than six months in the Netherlands or elsewhere in Europe and are therefore classified as having disappeared between 2015 and December 2025

Within certain communities, killing wolves is not experienced as a crime, but as a legitimate, if legally inconvenient, response to a problem that government has failed to solve.

◂ Wolf pups on farmland, Zuidwest Veluwe.

4.3.2

Hunters

Witness testimony consistently identifies hunters (including hunter-farmers, i.e. farmers with a hunting license) as the group most likely to be responsible for wolf poaching in the Netherlands.

Beyond their documented attitudes toward wolves, hunters are structurally well placed to carry out illegal killing: they are routinely present in rural areas at night, they are legally armed, they possess the skills and equipment — including thermal imaging, night-vision technology and knowledge of the terrain — to locate and kill wolves without detection, and they have established networks for coordinating activity and maintaining silence. In short, they have the means, the opportunity and the capacity to poach wolves in ways that are difficult to detect and even more difficult to prosecute.

Hunters feature prominently in the incidents documented in section 4.1. In the northeast, a hunter in Wapse was reported to have killed a wolf for payment, hunters in the Lauwersmeer area were actively pursuing a recently arrived wolf, and a witness reported drive hunts on the Uffelter Es coordinated through the Geen Wolf network. On the Veluwe, a hunter told a witness that shooting wolves with an air rifle when they appear on a property is common practice in the Elspeet area, adding that it "*happens everywhere here*" [W48]. Hunters were also reported to be among those conducting nocturnal patrols with roof-mounted spotlights near Renderklippen following the disappearance of a sheepdog. In Zeeland and Noord-Brabant, hunters with night-vision equipment were reported in the vicinity of wolf GW4097f around the time of her disappearance.

The accounts below, drawn from interviews with forest rangers, hunters, and other witnesses, paint a consistent picture of an occupational culture in which the wolf is viewed as a competitor and its illegal killing is widely tolerated, if not actively encouraged.

A hunter interviewed for this study was candid about the attitude within his own community: *'In their hearts, hunters would rather be rid of the wolf, I think. There are hunters who see the wolf as a competitor. Well, that is something you should not say'* [W46]. A forest ranger with extensive experience in Twente was more direct: *'Ninety percent of hunters in Twente are no good. I dare say that a large proportion of hunters constantly cross the line. They are poachers with a licence. If a hunter is sitting in his high seat and a wolf passes by, they will shoot'* [W43].

A forest ranger who has worked across multiple provinces was unequivocal about the role of hunters in wolf poaching: *"Given the means available today (thermal imaging and night vision equipment) and knowing how the average hunter looks at wolves, I have little confidence that they do not shoot wolves when they encounter one. If ten wolves have been poached, seven or eight of those were by hunters. Wolves don't stand a chance"*. He added: *"To be clear, I am talking about a portion of hunters. I know a lot of hunters who would never dream of shooting a wolf — they are pro-wolf"*. [W28].

A forest ranger on the Veluwe recounted a conversation at a meeting approximately five years ago: *'A hunter told me: if I see a wolf I will shoot it dead and throw it in the incinerator'* [W61]. A witness who had overheard conversations between hunters on the Veluwe described the casual manner in which illegal killing of wolves was discussed: *"I hear hunters saying: 'If I get one in my sights, I'll shoot it and then the whole street will help bury it.'* And another says: *'You can just throw it in the manure pit. We have enough of them here'"* [W48]. The same witness offered important context for understanding why the wolf provokes such intense hostility within hunting circles: *'Hunting is a lifestyle. It is what occupies them all day. They have dogs for hunting, a car for hunting, they spend all their free time on hunting, they have a style of dress for hunting. It is simply a lifestyle. And that is why it is so intense for them that the wolf is out there. Because it threatens their identity as a hunter. And I understand that — if you build everything in your life around something and it is suddenly no longer possible as you were used to, that is a genuine intrusion on your personal life'* [W48].

A forest ranger elaborated on the economic dimension, distinguishing between three types of hunters in the Netherlands. The first are small game hunters — farmers who hunt hares, pheasants and rabbits on their own land, partly to limit damage and partly for pleasure. The second are roe deer hunters, active across the country including on agricultural land. The third, and most economically significant, are the large game managers — what the witness described as *"the wealthy elite who hunt in the Netherlands"* — who hold the big game hunting rights, primarily on the Veluwe [W28]. This group operates within a substantial commercial system: hunting rights are leased through formal agreements, typically for six-year periods, and landowners — including smaller landowners on the Veluwe who hold rights over areas with red deer and wild boar — depend on this income. *"We are talking about hundreds of thousands of euros. Those smaller landowners need that income. And then it becomes very unpleasant when a wolf comes along and does it for free. It comes down to money, pure and simple"* [W28].

A hunter confirmed this economic logic while expressing his own suspicions about the involvement of fellow hunters: *"It could well be that hunters are involved in wolf poaching. If you pay a lot of money for an area and all the game is gone, that hits the people whose income depends on it. I do not doubt for a moment that it happens. I do not doubt it. But I cannot give you a concrete example"* [W46].

The financial interests of hunters in relation to wolves are also evident at the institutional level. In a blog post on the website of the Royal Dutch Hunting Association (Koninklijke Nederlandse Jagersvereniging, KNJV), its chair Laurens Hoedemaker — who also chairs the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE) — argued that hunters should be compensated for losses caused by wolves, stating: *"Hunters invest in their hunting grounds and pay hunting lease to the landowner. If the arrival of the wolf causes game to disappear from such a hunting ground, that represents an enormous loss in value. That should be compensated. Hunters are stakeholders in the countryside and it is therefore entirely logical that the interests of hunters are recognised as a legitimate interest in any decision-making"* (Hoedemaker, L., 2019).

The closed nature of the hunting community — and the social pressure that enforces silence — was identified by multiple witnesses as a key obstacle to accountability. *"Wildlife management is an enormously closed world — it is almost cult behaviour. They stay silent. They do not talk about it, they close their eyes"* [W28]. A witness with direct knowledge of hunting culture in Twente described how fear of social exclusion keeps members of the community from reporting illegal behaviour: *"Everyone is afraid for their own skin. If you are invited as a hunter to another hunter's place and you see things happen, you do not dare say anything because you want to be invited again next year"* [W43].

The witness accounts described above are corroborated by social media research, which identified numerous hunters making comments on Facebook that suggest awareness of, advocacy for, or direct involvement in wolf poaching. A selection of representative examples is presented below.

"Hunters invest in their hunting grounds and pay hunting lease to the landowner. If the arrival of the wolf causes game to disappear from such a hunting ground, that represents an enormous loss in value. That should be compensated."

◂ Figure 7 Compilation of images depicting Shoot, Shovel & Shut-up, posted by a hunter from the Veluwe, Gelderland, on his FB page, 8 December 2025.

“If the government neglects its duties, we will sort it out ourselves. The time for talking has long since passed”

€3,000-5,000

payment offers towards hunters from farmers for every wolf delivered to their yards, in the Netherlands (Omrop Fryslân, 2021).

26

hunters were convicted in Finland for poaching wolves and other wildlife, in the country’s largest ever poaching trial. The heaviest sentence was an 18-month suspended prison term (Sweden Herald, 2025).

41.9%

of confirmed human-caused wolf deaths in Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna, Italy were the result of illegal killing, (Musto et al. (2021).

A hunter based on the Veluwe who on his Facebook page describes himself as wolf expert, forest ranger, nature warden and hunter, made a series of increasingly explicit posts on Facebook between September 2025 and February 2026. In September 2025, he framed illegal killing as a matter of constitutional right: *“It is very simple. The constitution establishes that everyone has the right to a safe living environment. The government is obliged to ensure this and to act against unsafe situations. Moreover, everyone has the right to self-defence. If the government neglects its duties, we will sort it out ourselves. The time for talking has long since passed”*. In December 2025, he posted a compilation of images depicting the “*Shoot, Shovel and Shut up*” approach — also known as the 3-S treatment, this refers to a method for dealing with wolves and other unwanted or unwelcome wildlife primarily in rural areas. That same month, responding to a Facebook post about difficulties in shooting wolf Hubertus, he offered his services and described his preferred method in detail: *“They can still call me, but then we do it my way. First set up a few feeding sites, then wait for the wolf to come in the dark ”*. The reference to Hubertus relates to the legal culling permit issued in May 2025 for wolf GW4655m — nicknamed Hubertus — after he bit a jogger in De Hoge Veluwe national park, but despite months of effort, authorised hunters were unable to locate and shoot the animal under the strict conditions of the permit (De Gelderlander, 2025). In February 2026, the hunter posted an image of a wolf skin alongside a gun and ammunition, addressed *“To all wolf huggers…”*.

A business owner and hunter from Putten, on the Veluwe, made two revealing comments in early 2026. In January 2026, responding to a post on the Facebook group Geen Wolf about a wolf attack on livestock in Germany, he posted eleven ninja emoji 🥷🥷🥷🥷🥷🥷🥷🥷🥷🥷🥷 — a widely understood symbol among anti-wolf communities for hunters — without further comment. In February 2026, responding to a wolf sighting near Putten on the Facebook group Geen wolf in cultuurlandschap, he commented: *“Cull will soon be arranged”*, again accompanied by ninja emoji.

A hunter based in the Achterhoek, eastern Gelderland, posted an image on the Facebook group Weg met de Wolf in March 2025 bearing the words *“Schiessen Schaufeln Schweigen”* — the German equivalent of “*Shoot, Shovel and Shut up*” — leaving no ambiguity about his attitude toward wolves in his area.

The broader pattern of hunter involvement in wolf poaching is not limited to social media posts. In May 2021, the Dutch wolf monitoring organisation Stichting Wolf Nederland reported receiving multiple calls and messages from hunters indicating that a wolf spotted near Katlijk, Fryslân, was being actively hunted. According to the organisation, some hunters had been approached by farmers and offered payments of between €3,000 and €5,000 for every wolf delivered to their yard (Omrop Fryslân, 2021). The chair of the Fryslân Hunters Association denied that any of his members were involved, but the reports illustrate that the commissioning of wolf killings for financial reward — a pattern that recurs in witness testimony throughout this report — has been openly discussed within hunting circles for years.

◂ Figure 8 Comment by hunter on Geen Wolf suggesting intention or knowledge of wolf poaching, February 2026.

▲ Figure 9 Image posted by a hunter from the Achterhoek, Gelderland, on his Facebook, March 2025.

The identification of hunters as the primary perpetrators of wolf poaching is consistent with evidence from other European countries. In Poland, Nowak et al. (2021) found that in six out of seven cases in which the person who shot a wolf was eventually sentenced, hunters were responsible. In Norway, a landmark case investigated by the environmental crimes unit Økokrim resulted in the conviction of five men in 2015 for illegal wolf killing, treated by the courts as organised crime — all were licensed hunters (Sollund, 2017). In Denmark, a hunter was sentenced in 2018 to a suspended jail term of 40 days and confiscation of his rifle for shooting a wolf. The Danish Court of Appeal upheld the conviction in 2019, adding a two-year suspension of his hunting licence — marking a legal precedent in Denmark’s history (Xinhua, 2019). In Finland, 26 hunters were convicted in April 2025 in what police described as the country’s largest poaching trial, having illegally killed three wolves, six lynxes, a wolverine and several protected birds in North Savo between 2019 and 2023. The heaviest sentence was an 18-month suspended prison term (Sweden Herald, 2025). In Italy, Musto et al. (2021) found that 41.9% of confirmed human-caused wolf deaths in Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna were the result of illegal killing. The authors specifically note that hunters conflict with wolves and poach them, viewing them as competitors for game, and conclude that given the widespread practice of wild boar and deer hunting throughout central Italy, illegal killing of wolves by hunters is plausibly not restricted to specific locations but occurs across multiple sites. Research on Norwegian hunters by Skogen et al (2021) found that one in five declined to report illegal wolf killings, with unwillingness to report predicted by distrust of environmental institutions and anti-elite sentiment — a pattern of cultural resistance within hunting communities that closely mirrors what witnesses in this study described in Twente, the Veluwe and beyond.

The link between hunters and wolf killings in Drenthe was stated openly in a Facebook comment on 24 March 2026. Responding to a post about a recent wolf sighting in Hengelo on the group *De wolf in Nederland – Tussen wens en werkelijkheid*, an inhabitant of Assen, Drenthe, wrote: *“Wolf doesn’t belong in our country. Just shoot it. Thankfully, farmers with a hunting licence are willing to lend a hand here in Drenthe”* (Figure 10). The comment was removed shortly after the screenshot reproduced below was taken, suggesting either the author or owner of the FB group were aware it was incriminating.

▲ Figure 10 Screenshot of comment on Facebook by resident of Assen, Drenthe, suggesting farmers with a hunting license shoot wolves in Drenthe.

4.3.3

Organised networks and cooperation

There are strong indications that wolf poaching and persecution is not simply the spontaneous behaviour of individual farmers and hunters, but is coordinated to a significant degree by a network of organised groups leveraging social media to distribute an anti-wolf narrative and, in some cases, to mobilise direct action. At the centre of this network is Stichting No Wolves Benelux, which operates the website Geen Wolf and its associated social media channels *Geen wolf zoekt leden* (Facebook) and *Wolvenmeldpunt Geen Wolf* (Facebook and Instagram). These platforms function as a real-time operational infrastructure, distributing wolf sighting alerts that witnesses consistently describe as being used to mobilise groups to hunt down wolves. In at least one documented case in Drenthe, a nocturnal search operation was launched within hours of a *Geen Wolf* alert being published.

No Wolves Benelux operates within a broader coalition of anti-wolf groups. The Facebook groups *De wolf gezien op de Veluwe* and *Geen wolf in Cultuurlandschap* coordinate messaging and lobbying with *Stichting Wij(s) met Wolven*, which in turn collaborates with No Wolves Benelux, *Actiegroep Wolven Weg, Weg met de Wolf* and others — as is apparent from a joint letter sent to the leader of the far-right political party PVV (Party for Freedom) dated 13 March 2025, co-signed by all of the above (Wij(s) met Wolven, 2025). These groups maintain close ties with farming communities and farmer's action groups, such as Agractie, hunters, and various political parties including the BBB (Farmer-Citizen Movement) and VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy).

The tone set by the network's leadership is illustrated by a post made on 15 December 2025 (Figure 11) by an administrator of the *Geen wolf zoekt leden* Facebook group and a key organiser within No Wolves Benelux — himself a sheep farmer — who shared a night-vision video of a man aiming and firing a rifle, with the caption: '*Wishing everyone a creative Christmas*'. Given the platform and the audience, the message requires little interpretation.

The Facebook comment discussed above in section 4.3.2 from a resident of Assen posted in March 2026 — stating that '*farmers with a hunting licence are willing to lend a hand here in Drenthe*' — points to an organised division of roles that runs through this network: farmers provide the motivation and the land, hunters provide the firearms and the expertise. Whether this constitutes criminal coordination is a matter for prosecutors to determine. What the evidence in this study suggests is that wolf persecution in the Netherlands is not a fringe phenomenon carried out by a handful of outliers, but a distributed, socially embedded practice with tacit support from significant parts of the rural community and an organised infrastructure that facilitates it.

▸ Figure 11 Screenshot of video shared by an administrator of the Geen wolf zoekt leden Facebook group, 15 December 2025.


Photo: Tirza Verwijs

4.4

Modus operandi

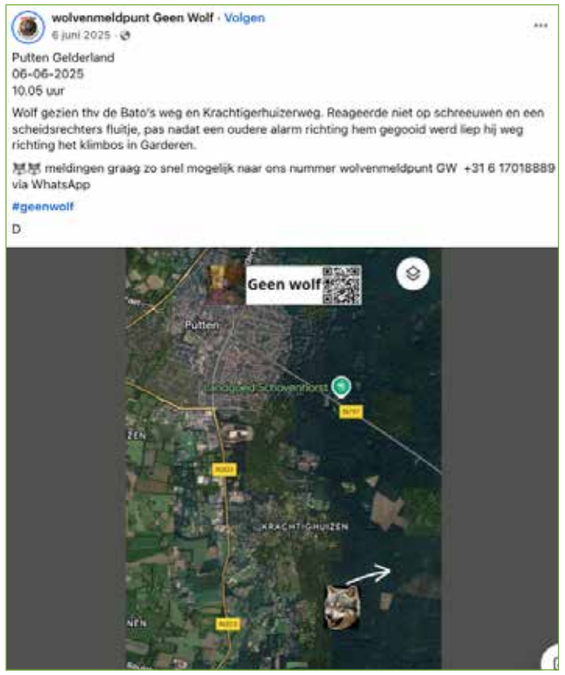
4.4.1

Methods to persecute and kill wolves

Coordination and communication networks

As described in section 4.1, digital platforms play a central role in organising anti-wolf activity. Multiple sources describe the use of app groups and social media platforms to share real-time wolf location data and coordinate responses. Local WhatsApp groups operating in locations including Elspeet, Ermelo, Hulshorst, Garderen, Uddel, and various Drenthe villages function as early warning and mobilisation systems [W01, W14, W17, W19, W30, W41, W54]. Wolf sighting alerts shared through platforms, such as *Geen Wolf*, are believed by multiple sources to function as incitement to pursue wolves, as discussed in section 4.1 [W01, W02, W14, W17, W48, W54].

▲ Wolf with prey on the Noord-Veluwe.



▸ Figure 12 Screenshot of a wolf sighting alert shared by Wolvenmeldpunt Geen Wolf. Source: Facebook.

Vehicle Pursuit

Traffic accidents are by far the leading registered cause of wolf mortality in the Netherlands, accounting for 70% of all recorded deaths between 2017 and 2025 (see section 2.3). While most of these incidents are undoubtedly accidental, the evidence gathered in this study raises questions about whether all wolf-vehicle collisions recorded as accidents are in fact unintentional. The coordinated pursuit methods described below, combined with social media posts explicitly advocating the use of vehicles as weapons against wolves, suggest that the boundary between accident and deliberate act may be less clear than official mortality statistics imply.

Sources describe coordinated pursuit methods involving quads, cars and four-wheel-drive vehicles to chase and, in some cases, deliberately run over wolves. Remote agricultural roads where wolves are more exposed are reportedly exploited for this purpose [W14, W26, W27, W36]. One witness [W01] described a specific stretch of road in Drenthe — later identified as the Huenderweg — where individuals repeatedly drove back and forth at high speed, knowing that a wolf regularly crossed there. A wolf was killed on the Huenderweg on 11 December 2025. A subsequent police investigation did not establish intent (RTV Drenthe, 2025), although a drone had been observed in the area the previous evening [W01].

Several social media comments recorded during this study suggest the deliberate use of vehicles as weapons against wolves. On 26 January 2026, a user on the Facebook group *Wolvenmeldpunt Geen Wolf* responded to a post about a wolf killed by a car in Dalen, Drenthe, with the following: *"Instead of an evening walk with the dog before bed, you take the Land Rover, fit the steel — not aluminium — bullbar on the bumper, and do a loop through a forested area. Guaranteed you will hit the target one night. Much more exciting and anonymous. And you won't need to pay that €20,000 fine. No gun needed anymore. Should work! Come on people, success guaranteed!"*.

On 16 November 2025, following a court ruling voiding the permit to shoot wolf Hubertus in De Hoge Veluwe, a resident of Drenthe wrote on the Facebook page of news outlet AD: *"There will surely be someone who will use their bumper. In Drenthe that has also been a resounding success. Four wolves to wolf heaven in ten days"*. The claim that four wolves were killed in this manner in Drenthe within ten days was reinforced by a reply from another user, who advised: *"First attach the bull-bar, then spend an evening touring the Veluwe and Drenthe"* .

"...you take the Land Rover, fit the steel — not aluminium — bullbar on the bumper, and do a loop through a forested area. Guaranteed you will hit the target one night. Much more exciting and anonymous. And you won't need to pay that €20,000 fine. No gun needed anymore".

Baiting and trapping

In April 2024, a Facebook user from Tytsjerksteradiel (Fryslân) posted detailed instructions in a *Geen Wolf* discussion on how to lure wolves using drag trails of dead animals across farmland — explicitly referencing the English drag-hunt method — and described how such a trail could lead a wolf to a cage trap baited with live animals. He also suggested to buy a hunting rifle from before 1870, available for a few hundred euros on Marktplaats.

Use of drones

There are indications that drones are used to locate wolves for lethal purposes. As described in section 4.1.2, on 26 March 2026, a follower of Facebook group Wolf in Maurik en omstreken responded to a wolf sighting near Maurik (Gelderland) by posting an image of a drone with the text '*I am available for hire* 🪖👈" and "*we're heading out again this weekend* 😊 ' (Figure 13). As noted above, drones were observed in the area of the Huenderweg the evening before a wolf was found dead there on 11 December 2025 [W01; RTV Drenthe, 2025].

◂ Wolf killed by car.

▲ Figure 13 Screenshot of comment in FB group Wolf in Maurik en omstreken by man with drone offering his services in locating the wolf seen near Maurik, Gelderland, on 26 March 2026.

‘If you want to shoot a wolf, you don’t have to put much effort into it. Those wolves are active at night, and if you know roughly where they tend to go — and any competent hunter knows where they are — he can simply go and get them’

Shooting

Shooting is by far the most frequently documented method of killing wolves in this study. Multiple witnesses noted that advances in night-vision and thermal imaging technology have made shooting wolves significantly easier and have become increasingly widespread among hunters [W28, W43, W61]. A forest ranger explained: *‘If you want to shoot a wolf, you don’t have to put much effort into it. Those wolves are active at night, and if you know roughly where they tend to go — and any competent hunter knows where they are — he can simply go and get them’* [W28].

Several witnesses specifically highlighted the use of high-powered compressed air rifles (PCP luchtbuksen) paired with night-vision and thermal imaging equipment [W02, W27, W28, W42, W43, W44, W45, W59]. Unlike hunting rifles, these weapons are unregulated in the Netherlands and can be purchased freely online. One forest ranger described them as the poacher’s weapon of choice [W61], while another noted that air rifles are commonly seized during searches of the homes of suspected poachers and farmers [W43]. The absence of any licensing requirement means their use leaves no paper trail — a significant advantage for those seeking to avoid detection.

Social media research corroborates this picture. In December 2025, in a discussion about wolf attacks on livestock, a user suggested that high-calibre air rifles are sufficient to kill a wolf, in response to someone expressing a wish to help rid the area of wolves but claiming not to own a suitable weapon.

▲ Figure 14 Photo of a wolf skin with a gun and ammunition placed on top of it, posted by a hunter from the Veluwe on his Facebook page, 26 February 2026.

Poisoning

Multiple witnesses reported incidents of suspected or attempted poisoning involving pieces of meat placed in areas known to be used by wolves. In November 2023, a witness discovered a piece of meat placed several metres from a footpath near Oude Willem, Drenthe, in an area regularly frequented by the wolf known as the mouse catcher (described in section 4.1.1), who subsequently disappeared and is believed to have been poached. Suspecting the meat had been placed to poison the wolf, the witness removed it [W01]. In April 2025, multiple sources reported that a farmer had placed poisoned meat near the onderduikershol — a known wolf location near Diever, Drenthe — with the apparent intent to kill wolves in the area [W01]. On the Utrechtse Heuvelrug, separate incidents involving suspected bait items — including tripe (pens) [W60] and salami [W04, W59] — were also recorded.


Photo: Ramon van Bentum

4.4.2

Disposal and concealment of wolf carcasses

Sources across multiple regions describe a consistent set of methods used to conceal or destroy wolf carcasses following illegal killing, with techniques chosen specifically to eliminate biological evidence. Documented methods include burial in slurry pits, where bacterial activity ensures complete decomposition [W03, W23, W33]; incineration in fire barrels [W01, W17, W41, W50]; submersion in water bodies, with the Veluwemeer specifically mentioned [W17, W33]; and deep burial at depths of three metres or more, selected to prevent detection of implanted chips [W01, W45].

On 16 November 2025, a Facebook user from Drenthe responded to an article about wolves by describing local practice in the following terms: *“Dig a pit, throw the shot wolf in with quicklime, close it up, step over it and forget it. That is how we do it here in Drenthe”*. The quicklime method was independently corroborated by a member of the pro-wolf Facebook group Groep Wolf, who, responding to someone reporting that wolves were being poached, confirmed this was true and added: *“If they manage to bring a wolf down, it goes into the ground, preferably with a good amount of lime over it — apparently it disappears even faster that way. Livestock farmers are in contact with each other and as soon as a wolf is spotted, action is taken. Who, what, where — that of course stays buried”* .

The consistency of these methods across independent sources and geographic regions is significant. It suggests not improvisation but shared knowledge — a repertoire of techniques circulating within networks of individuals engaged in, or aware of, wolf persecution.

▲ Wolf of the Utrechtse Heuvelrug pack.

Drivers

Photo: Tirza Verwijs

5.1

Human-wolf conflict

The arrival of wolves in the Netherlands has had a significant and well-documented impact on the daily lives of livestock farmers and other rural inhabitants. Coexisting with a large carnivore poses challenges for communities that have never had to consider the safety of their animals or, in some cases, their children. Wolf attacks on livestock are widely covered in the media, and graphic images of dead or injured animals shared on social media generate considerable anger and frustration.

Research conducted for this study on social media over several months revealed widespread fear among rural residents — for their livestock, their dogs and their children. This was illustrated in January 2026, when a primary school in Ruinen, Drenthe, closed for a day after a wolf was sighted nearby. Experts explained that the animal was most likely a young disperser posing no risk to the village, but the incident nonetheless intensified anti-wolf sentiment in the area (Hart van Nederland, 2026b). People describe being afraid to walk in areas frequented by wolves, to let children cycle to school unsupervised, or to take dogs into the forest.

One fifth-generation dairy farmer in Drenthe [W55] described how the wolf's arrival fundamentally changed the way he runs his operation. Since a wolf killed one of the sheep his children kept as a hobby, the sheep only go outside during the day. All cattle — including young stock that were routinely grazed on a separate plot some distance away — are now kept indoors, a change that has affected both the running of the business and, in his view, animal welfare. *"We used to let the young cattle graze themselves. Now we have to cut and store all the grass ourselves."* Installing wolf-proof fencing is not a realistic solution, he argues: with multiple plots spread across different locations, the logistical burden would be enormous and he has little confidence it would be effective. Although he describes the wolf as a fascinating animal, he is unequivocal about its place in the Dutch countryside. *"I am a true animal lover,"* he says, *"but if it were up to me, I would shoot them. Or at the very least manage them."* What he finds hardest is not the financial burden but what he experiences as an inversion of responsibility: when an animal is taken by a wolf, he says, farmers are accused of failing to protect their livestock. *"We care for our animals day and night. And then, when the wolf takes one, we get the blame. That makes me genuinely angry."* Like many of his neighbours, he does not condemn those who take the law into their own hands: *"If someone were to shoot a wolf, I personally wouldn't mind. That's one fewer."*

In recent years, the call for wolves to be culled has grown louder. In May 2023, at a meeting with the Drenthe province wolf commission, farmers complained that compensation payments and fencing subsidies were arriving too slowly and that the personnel costs of installing protective fencing were not covered. (Steenwijker Courant, 2023).

For professional sheep farmers in particular, installing and maintaining wolf-proof fencing represents a significant additional burden on a sector already under severe financial pressure. Despite being heavily subsidised, sheep farming is loss-making for many businesses in the Netherlands. A recent study of the financial resilience (draagkracht) of the Dutch sheep farming sector found that for the approximately 2,000 businesses for which sheep farming is their primary activity, the sector yields negative economic results — an average loss of approximately €14,594 per business per year, amounting to a total negative balance of approximately €29.2 million across the sector (Backus et al., 2025). Against this backdrop, the additional costs of wolf-proofing land and livestock represent not merely an inconvenience but, for many, an existential threat to the viability of their business.

For some rural residents, the difficulty lies not in unwillingness to adapt, but in the practical and regulatory obstacles that make adaptation impossible. A horse owner near Putten on the Veluwe [W39] described the wolf's presence as a significant disruption to her daily life. She can no longer take her horses freely into the forest as she used to and must keep them inside at night. She noted that she is fortunate to have a proper stable, adding that many others in her area do not — and face strict municipal zoning restrictions that prevent them from constructing the outbuildings that would allow them to do so. This produces considerable frustration: *"You ask people to adapt, and people are willing to do something, but what you are supposed to do is made impossible due to environmental limitations."* She also noted that trust in wolf-proof fencing is low in her area, citing several local cases in which fencing believed to have been installed in accordance with BIJ12 requirements failed to prevent wolf attacks.

Farmers have very little confidence in the government agencies responsible for implementing wolf policy. A sheep farmer from Drenthe [W07] was critical of both provincial and national government, describing the wolf consultants as insufficiently competent and the compensation scheme as dysfunctional — with payments taking months to arrive. He also questioned the DNA collection process: *"Too often they cannot prove it was a wolf, and therefore it is not a wolf, even though the signs clearly point to a wolf attack."* The broader mood in his area, he said, is one of discouragement: *"Many people here are getting desperate and hopeless because of all the things that go wrong. Here in the area the tendency is to hate conservationists more than the wolf."* He added that for many livestock farmers the decision is ultimately financial: the costs of adapting to the wolf's presence must be weighed against income that is already under pressure, and if the calculation does not work out, farmers will simply stop keeping sheep — with consequences for the landscape and rural character of the area. Many hobby sheep farmers in Drenthe, he said, have already made that choice. This witness had not heard that wolves are being poached, but reflected that if illegal killing is occurring, it is likely driven not by hatred of the animal, but by frustration with government institutions [W07].

What emerges from these accounts is a picture of profound polarisation between rural communities and a national government perceived as distant, incompetent and indifferent to the realities of life with wolves. This polarisation extends to public discourse more broadly: every incident involving a wolf attack on livestock triggers fierce debates on social media, with those in favour of wolf conservation arguing that affected farmers failed to adequately protect their livestock, and those opposed countering that wolf-proof fencing is insufficient and unreasonable to expect. Both sides talk past each other, and the wolf has become a proxy for a much deeper divide between urban and rural Netherlands.

This dynamic is consistent with findings from comparable contexts elsewhere in Europe. Komi (2025), in a study of wolf conservation debates in Finland, found that opposition to wolves is rarely just about the animal itself — it reflects a deeper anxiety about the erosion of rural ways of life and a sense that conservation policy is being imposed by urban and institutional actors who do not share, or even understand, the realities of rural existence. The wolf, in this reading, becomes a symbol of a political and cultural order that rural communities feel powerless to resist through legitimate means.

For many of those interviewed, frustration with policy failures — slow compensation, disputed damage assessments, and fencing requirements that many feel are either unaffordable or unworkable in practice — has curdled into a broader distrust of institutions and, increasingly, into hatred not of the wolf itself but of everything the wolf has come to represent: urban values, conservation priorities and a government that, in the words of one Drenthe farmer, acts as though "*the whole world is crazy*" while farmers feel they are left to bear the costs alone (RTV Drenthe, 2022).

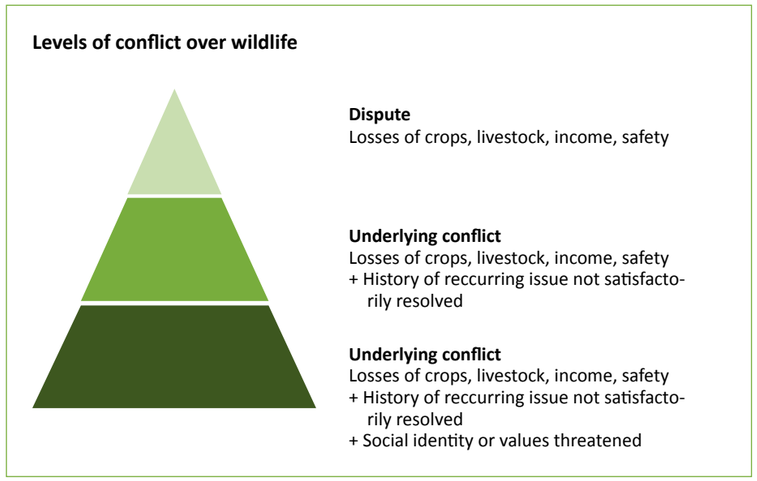


Figure 15 Levels of conflict over wildlife, distinguishing between a surface-level dispute over material losses, an underlying conflict rooted in a history of unresolved grievances, and a deep-rooted conflict in which social identity and values are threatened. The wolf conflict in the Netherlands exhibits characteristics of all three levels but is most accurately described as a deep-rooted conflict. Source: Figure adapted from Zimmermann et al. (2020), licensed under CC BY.

◂ Sheep protected from a wolf by a wolf-repellent fence, Veluwe, 2020. Screenshot of video by the Dutch Mammal Society

89-95%

of all recorded attacks involved completely unprotected livestock in each year between 2020 and 2025.

Where practical support and adequate subsidy schemes are in place, uptake of protective measures can increase substantially — and this translates into real reductions in livestock losses

Lack of adequate protection

The picture is not, however, one-sided. Data from BIJ12 covering the period 2020–2025 reveal a stark and widening gap between the growth of the wolf population and the uptake of protective measures by livestock owners (Figure 16). While the absolute number of attacks involving adequately protected livestock has increased — from just one in 2020 to 81 in 2025 — this growth has been far outpaced by the overall rise in attacks.

In 2025, 1,114 wolf attacks on livestock were recorded, of which only 7% involved livestock protected in accordance with the advisory standard set out in the Fauna Damage Prevention Kit (*Faunaschade Preventiepakket*), and a further 4% involved livestock where efforts had been made but deficiencies were observed. The remaining 89% — 988 attacks — involved livestock with no protective measures in place whatsoever.

Expressed differently: in each year between 2020 and 2025, between 89% and 95% of all recorded attacks involved completely unprotected livestock. As the wolf population has grown and attacks have multiplied more than tenfold over this period, the proportion of unprotected livestock has barely changed. The data suggest that for a large majority of livestock owners, the response to the wolf's arrival has not been to protect their animals, but to leave them exposed — while demanding that the problem be solved by other means. The absence of a binding obligation to implement protective measures as a condition for compensation — itself the result of political pressure from farmers and BBB provincial executives, as described in section 3.4 — further reduces the incentive to invest in protection.

The picture is not uniformly bleak. Evidence from Drenthe suggests that where practical support and adequate subsidy schemes are in place, uptake of protective measures can increase substantially — and that this translates into real reductions in livestock losses. A survey commissioned by the province of Drenthe and conducted in the winter of 2025/2026 found that the proportion of sheep behind wolf-repellent fencing in the Drents-Friese Wold pack territory had risen from 30% to 77% in a single year; in the Midden-Drenthe pack territory, the increase was from 38% to 86% over the same period. Concurrently, livestock losses attributed to wolves in Drenthe declined: in the first months of 2026, at least 116 livestock animals were killed by wolves up to 9 March, compared with 154 in the same period the previous year (NOS, 2026b). While it is too early to establish a definitive causal link between increased protection and reduced livestock losses, the Drenthe data demonstrate that significant and rapid improvement in uptake is achievable — and that the national picture of near-universal non-compliance is not inevitable.

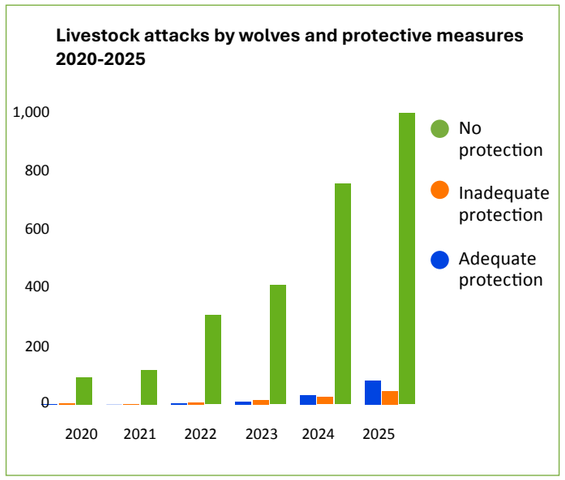


Figure 16 Livestock attacks and protective measures 2020-2025. Source: BIJ12.

Why, then, does non-compliance remain so widespread elsewhere? The failure to adopt protective measures is driven by a combination of economic disincentives and deliberate political resistance. As Komi (2025) argues, anti-wolf communities actively construct alternative frameworks of knowledge in which conservation science is distrusted and community experience is positioned as the true authority. Within such frameworks, installing wolf-proof fencing is not simply a practical decision but a political one — an act of acceptance that contradicts the community's collective position that wolves should not be there at all.

The ecological consequences of the active rejection of protective measures extend far beyond individual livestock losses and pose a fundamental obstacle to coexistence. Wolves are highly intelligent animals that learn quickly from experience. Repeated access to unprotected or inadequately protected livestock teaches wolves that domestic animals are an accessible and rewarding prey source — a behavioural pattern that, once established, is difficult to reverse.

Equally, wolves that successfully breach fences with structural deficiencies are more likely to attempt to do so again — the predation pressure that fences must withstand is affected, among other factors, by wolves' previous experience with fences (Hansen et al., 2020). The widespread failure to meet the advisory standard therefore does not only affect those farmers who have taken no measures: it shapes wolf behaviour in ways that increase the risk of attacks across the board, including on farms where adequate protection is in place. Effective coexistence between wolves and livestock farming is only achievable if protective measures are adopted consistently and correctly — a condition that, on current evidence, is far from being met.

A further structural factor compounds the problem. Most Dutch provinces maintain a zero-tolerance policy (*nulstandsbeleid*) for large wild ungulates — including red deer, fallow deer and wild boar. This policy dates from the Hunting Act (*Jachtwet*) of the early 1990s, when it was introduced to address agricultural damage, road safety, disease spread and damage to wild flora and fauna (Nijhuis, n.d.). It significantly limits the availability of natural prey across large parts of the Netherlands. Where wolves cannot sustain themselves on wild ungulates, the likelihood that they will turn to livestock increases — not because wolves prefer domestic animals, but because accessible prey is scarce. The zero-tolerance policy for wild ungulates is therefore not simply a hunting management decision: it is a contributing factor of human-wolf conflict that has received too little attention in the policy debate. Addressing livestock losses without also considering the availability of wild prey for wolves may therefore be insufficient to reduce conflict in the long term.

In most areas frequented by wolves in the Netherlands, livestock remains unprotected. The image below illustrates the contradiction at the heart of the debate: sheep grazing unprotected in Hulshorst — a village that recorded 24 wolf attacks between 2022 and 2025 — in a pasture where the farmer has erected a banner reading '*Sheep are not safe because the damned wolf is sacred*'. The absence of any protective fencing in the same field reflects a choice that, given the evidence above, is difficult to reconcile with the argument that coexistence is being imposed on farmers who have done everything they can.

◂ Wolf filmed on farm land near Orvelte, Drenthe, 27 May 2026. Screenshot of wolf sighting shared on Instagram by Geen Wolf www.instagram.com/p/DY19AUjiMJC/?img_index=1

▲ Protest-banner against the wolf ('Sheep are not safe because the damned wolf is sacred'), in pasture with unprotected sheep. Hulshorst, 18 January 2026. Photos: Pauline Verheij.

5.2

Social media

The wolf debate in the Netherlands has been shaped by both traditional and social media. Mainstream media coverage has at times been characterised by sensationalism and one-sided reporting — focusing disproportionately on wolf attacks, livestock losses and threats to human safety, while giving less prominence to the broader context of wolf behaviour and ecology, the statistical rarity of human-wolf encounters, or the effectiveness of protective measures. This coverage has contributed to a climate of fear and hostility that both reinforces and is reinforced by social media dynamics. It is on social media, however, that these dynamics have been most consequential for wolf persecution, for reasons examined in this section.

Social media plays a significant role in escalating conflict around wolves by facilitating the spread of misinformation and the algorithmic amplification of emotionally charged content. Research on online misinformation shows that false or misleading claims spread especially effectively when they evoke fear, outrage or moral anger, and that platform algorithms systematically amplify exactly this type of content because it generates engagement (McLoughlin et al., 2024; Germano et al., 2026).

This dynamic is particularly consequential in the context of large carnivores. Nanni et al. (2020) found that news about predator attacks on humans spreads significantly further on social media when it is graphic or sensationalistic in character, and that the information circulating on these platforms is heavily biased toward such representations. The authors warn that this pattern drives what they describe as a social amplification of perceived risk — generating levels of fear that are disproportionate to the actual probability of an encounter and reducing public tolerance toward large carnivores in ways that can directly undermine conservation efforts.

Although wolves rarely attack humans and encounters remain statistically uncommon, the selective circulation of graphic attack content creates a distorted picture of the risk wolves pose — one that is more emotionally compelling than accurate. In the Dutch context, visual disinformation research shows that online images lend deceptive claims a strong appearance of authenticity, making misleading narratives harder to challenge (Hameleers, 2025). Since negative attitudes toward wolves are closely associated with fear and perceived threat (Barmoen et al., 2024), repeated exposure to misleading and alarmist content may help create a social climate in which hostility toward wolves is normalised and illegal acts such as poaching become easier to justify.

Social media research conducted by Rhizome Insights as part of this study analysed the posting activity of 283 selected anti-wolf social media accounts in the Netherlands and the EU, examining posts, biographies and comments containing both the term *'wolf'* (or wolven) and *'schieten'* (shooting). It should be noted that posts containing these terms reflect a range of sentiments, including positive, neutral and negative positions toward wolves. The analysis found that negative attitudes toward wolves shared in anti-wolf Facebook groups have surged since mid-2025, with certain events functioning as triggers. Posting volume peaked around the culling of wolf Bram (GW3237m) on 2 December 2025 — designated a 'problem wolf' following a series of incidents involving people on the Utrechtse Heuvelrug, including his attack on a child on 30 July 2025, and the subject of a shooting permit issued on 6 July 2025 — likely reflecting increased online speculation regarding the identity of the animal referenced in media coverage. The figure above illustrates the trend in the volume of posts containing the terms *schieten* and *wolf* (Figure 17).

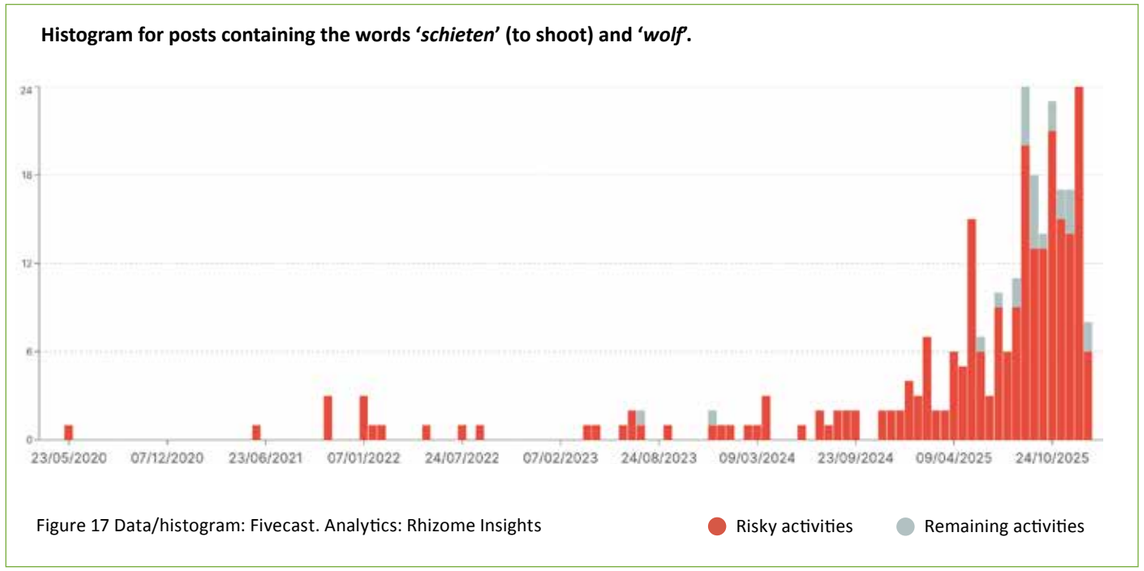


Figure 17 Data/histogram: Fivecast. Analytics: Rhizome Insights

▲ Figure 18 Anti-wolf campaign poster published by Stichting Annemieke, which also appeared as a full-page advertisement in newspaper De Telegraaf. The poster depicts the wolf as a snarling predator and declares it "a threat to humans, pets, horses, livestock and nature," adding that "images of wolf victims are too shocking to show here." The framing is characteristic of the sensationalist and alarmist content that circulates widely in Dutch anti-wolf communities on social media. Source: Stichting Annemieke, www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10226781845560843&set=g.170411843786379.

Certain narratives have come to dominate the wolf debate on Dutch social media. These include the claim that there is insufficient space for both humans and wolves in the Dutch cultural landscape; that wolves are inherently dangerous and pose a threat to human safety, domestic pets and livestock; that wolves should be "managed" (*beheerd*) — a term widely understood as a euphemism for culling; and that protective legislation has been imposed on rural communities by the European Union rather than emerging from domestic democratic processes. These narratives are mutually reinforcing and taken together, construct a framework in which illegal killing can be rationalised as a legitimate and necessary response to government failure.

This pattern is not unique to the Netherlands. Komi (2025), in a study of wolf conservation debates in Finland based on ethnographic fieldwork and analysis of Facebook groups, found that critics of wolf conservation consistently frame their opposition in terms of a fundamental concern for the future of rural life and traditions. Crucially, Komi found that while distrusting conservation scientists, these communities mimic scientific language and official data to claim epistemic authority — presenting their views not as opinion but as the suppressed "real truth" about wolves. This post-truth dynamic, in which anti-wolf communities position themselves as truth-tellers against a corrupt scientific and governmental establishment, is clearly visible in the Dutch context and helps explain why factual corrections have so little effect on those already embedded in these networks.

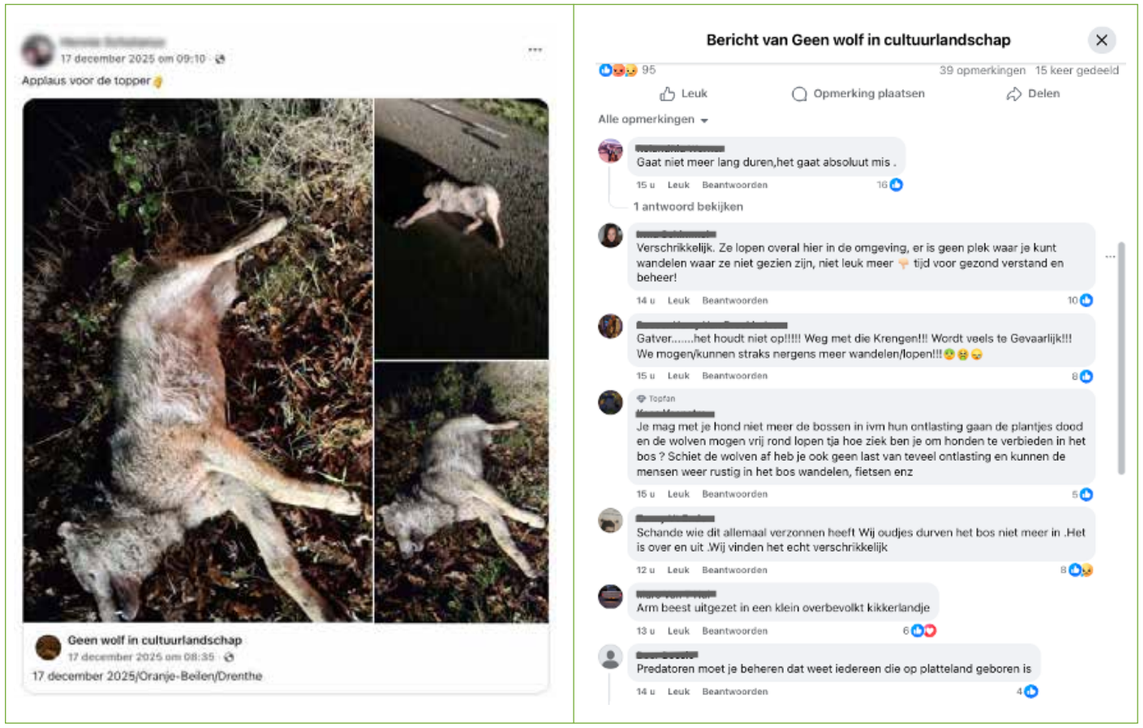
Misinformation and conspiracy theories

By enabling individuals to connect easily with like-minded others, social media platforms create conditions in which conspiracy theories can thrive and misinformation can spread faster and more widely than corrections. The consequences are well documented: beliefs become more extreme, more resistant to factual challenge, and trust in legitimate institutions erodes.

Several conspiracy narratives related to wolves have been identified in the course of this research. These include claims that wolves did not return to the Netherlands naturally, but were deliberately released by the government or by conservation organisations; that the government intends to rewild the Dutch countryside wholesale, ending farming as a livelihood and relocating rural residents to so-called "15-minute cities"; that wolves in the Netherlands are in fact wolf-dog hybrids rather than pure wolves; and that monitored wolves have been microchipped as part of a broader surveillance agenda.

None of these claims is supported by evidence (NOS, 2024b). Yet they circulate widely in anti-wolf communities and serve a clear function: they deepen distrust of scientific institutions and government agencies, and they provide a moral framework in which opposition to wolf conservation — including illegal killing — can be presented as resistance to deception rather than violation of the law.

This is consistent with Komi's (2025) finding that post-truth strategies — whereby critics of wolf conservation reject scientific consensus while mimicking its language to claim their own epistemic authority — are not simply a fringe phenomenon, but reflect and reinforce broader power struggles over who has the authority to define what is true about wildlife and rural life.



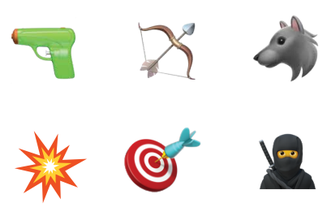
Incitement and coded communication

Research conducted for this study on Facebook and other platforms found that wolf poaching is actively promoted in certain communities and widely perceived within them as a legitimate response to a problem the government has failed to address. Some calls for violence are overt, as the social media posts documented in sections 4.1 and 4.3 of this report illustrate. However, covert and coded communication is also widely used — possibly to circumvent platform moderation — including the use of emojis, acronyms, GIFs and images whose meaning is understood within the community but not immediately legible to outsiders.

Commonly used symbols in anti-wolf communities on Dutch social media include a gun (🔫), a crossbow (🏹), a wolf (🐺), an explosion (💥), a target (🎯) and a ninja figure (🥷) — the latter widely understood within these communities to refer to hunters acting covertly. The acronym SSS — standing for “Shoot, Shovel and Shut up” — has been adopted from pro-hunting communities in Germany and is used openly in Dutch anti-wolf spaces to refer to the extrajudicial killing and concealment of wolves. As documented in section 4.3.2, the phrase and its visual equivalents appear repeatedly in the social media posts of individuals with direct knowledge of or involvement in wolf persecution.

The cumulative effect of these dynamics — the circulation of radicalising narratives, the normalisation of conspiracy thinking, the use of coded language that allows incitement to operate below the threshold of overt illegality — is to create a digital environment in which wolf persecution is not merely tolerated but celebrated. For those on the margins of these communities, the social and informational pressure to view illegal killing as acceptable, even admirable, is considerable.

What the research of Nanni et al. (2020), Komi (2025) and others demonstrate is that this is not an accident: it is the predictable outcome of platform dynamics that reward emotional intensity over accuracy, and of a political environment in which anti-conservation sentiment has found both an audience and an infrastructure.



Commonly used symbols in anti-wolf communities on Dutch social media (gun, crossbow, wolf, explosion, target, and ninja figure

▲ Figure 19 Expressions of anti-wolf sentiment by followers of FB account Geen wolf in cultuurlandschap, 6 January 2026.

◀ Post by user of FB account Geen wolf in cultuurlandschap applauding the person who ran over this wolf on 17 December 2025.

Arjen Heeres

5.3

Politics

Across Europe and North America, the wolf debate repeatedly expands beyond questions of ecology or livestock damage and becomes a dispute about power, place, and belonging. Where wolves return, they often come to represent a much larger struggle over who gets to define rural life, whose knowledge matters, and whether conservation policy is being imposed from above.

In Germany, this dynamic is closely tied to rural–urban resentment: wolf protection has been experienced not simply as nature policy, but as another sign that farmers, hunters, and other rural residents are expected to carry the costs of decisions made elsewhere (Niedziałkowski, 2022). In eastern Germany, this has taken on an especially charged form, with the wolf becoming entangled in a broader politics of fear in which threats to livestock, landscape, and local ways of life merge with anxieties about migration, demographic change, and loss of control; as Pates and Leser (2021) show, the wolf has been cast by right-wing populist actors as an “invasive species” that resonates with anti-immigration narratives and feelings of abandonment in post-socialist regions.

That symbolic politics can also translate into electoral consequences: municipalities experiencing wolf attacks on livestock saw increased support for the far-right AfD, while far-right politicians actively framed the wolf as a threat to farmers and rural livelihoods (Clemm von Hohenberg & Hager, 2022). A media discourse analysis of the German wolf debate found that rural actors most directly affected by wolves feel abandoned and dominated by urban perspectives and politics, and that this sense of political alienation generates linkages to right-wing populist positions and conspiracy narratives (Zscheischler & Friedrich, 2022) — a dynamic strikingly consistent with what this report documents in the Netherlands.

Comparable dynamics have been documented in Scandinavia, where rural resistance to wolf conservation is rooted in class-based antagonism toward urban elites perceived as imposing conservation at the expense of traditional ways of life (Krange & Skogen, 2011), and in Finland, where Pohja-Mykrä (2016) found that illegal killing of large carnivores is widely understood within rural communities not as criminal behaviour but as an act of defiance against a centralised conservation regime lacking local legitimacy.

In the United States, attitudes toward wolves align strongly with partisan political identity and wider conflicts over government authority and land use (Van Eeden et al., 2021). Taken together, this body of research suggests that the politicisation of the wolf debate — and the tolerance or active support for illegal killing that it can generate — is not a local peculiarity, but a recurring pattern wherever wolves return to human-dominated landscapes.

▲ Wolf with pups, Zuidwest Veluwe.

In the Dutch political debate, the wolf is increasingly presented as evidence that rural concerns are being ignored by national and European policymakers. This framing is especially visible in the rhetoric of the BBB (*BoerBurgerBeweging, Farmer-Citizen Movement*) and the SGP (Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij), a conservative Protestant Christian party. BBB politicians repeatedly frame the wolf as a matter of safety, control and government failure.

Henk Vermeer, co-founder and leader of the BBB and member of the House of Representatives, argued in 2024 for a "*wolf-free zone the size of the Netherlands*" and stated that "*the wolf has to go*" (Sven op 1, 2024). At a BBB panel discussion on wolves in Utrecht province in 2024, Rik Loeters, BBB leader in Gelderland, stated that the party was striving for a wolf-free Gelderland and preferably for the whole of the Netherlands, before adding: "*In Germany, certainly in eastern Germany, most work according to the 3-S system: Schiessen, Schaufeln, Schweigen — Shoot, Shovel, Shut up — and that is going to happen here too*". The comment was met with applause; a video recording had been viewed nearly 18,000 times at the time of writing (Dwarsnieuws, 2024).

In 2025, Eric Kemperman — a hunter, member of the Gelderland Provincial Council and member of the Senate — declared that coexistence with the wolf was impossible ("samenleven met wolven helaas niet mogelijk is") and concluded: "*It is done, as far as we are concerned — over and out*" (Nieuwe Oogst, 2025). Kemperman had represented BBB until May 2025, before joining the far-right Forum voor Democratie (FVD) in September 2025. He is also active in several hunting organisations (Parlement.com, n.d.). Harold Zoet, BBB provincial executive for agriculture in Gelderland, has consistently advocated active wolf population management. During a Provincial Council meeting in February 2024, discussing the difficulty of ensuring the right wolf is culled, he stated: "*First pull the trigger, apologies can be made later*" (Van Es, 2024).

At national level, BBB State Secretary for Agriculture Jean Rummenie repeatedly called for weakening wolf protections during his term in office, ignoring civil service advice, questioning the independence of Wageningen University and dismissing their scientific findings on the favourable conservation status of the wolf in the Netherlands (NU.nl, 2026).

The SGP has also made the wolf a focus for its political campaigning, placing particular emphasis on family life, public order and social unrest. In its campaign "*De wolf is geen sprookje*!" (*The wolf is no fairy tale!*) the party states that "*the Netherlands is simply too densely populated for a predator like the wolf*", while the wolf's presence near homes and farms is described as having become "*untenable*". Among other things, the SGP calls for more space for mayors and police to intervene in unsafe situations and to allow for culling in areas '*where the wolf doesn't belong*', without explaining what that entails (SGP, 2025). In Gelderland, SGP provincial councillor Gerrit Averesch stated that the wolf had undermined people's sense of safety, adding: "*We do not call on people to take matters into their own hands, but we understand it. The SGP wants active management to begin as soon as possible*" (Nieuwe Oogst, 2025).

These examples represent a small selection of the political commentary on wolves made at local, provincial and national levels in the Netherlands in recent years. What unites these statements is not a coherent wildlife management proposal, but a political narrative: the wolf is presented as an alien creature that does not belong in the Netherlands, with culling positioned as the only realistic response.

Crucially, the political figures quoted here are not simply expressing frustration — they are publicly validating the view that the law is illegitimate and that extrajudicial action is understandable, if not desirable. Statements of this kind made by elected officials create a political environment in which illegal killing is normalised. This is compounded by the fact that the policies being demanded — culling, wolf-free zones, removal of EU protections — are either unlawful under current legislation or, in the case of culling, not supported by evidence as an effective means of reducing livestock attacks (Kutal et al., 2024; Treves et al., 2025). Rather than providing solutions, this political discourse deepens the conflict and provides cover for persecution.

▲ Wolf, Northern Veluwe.

The temporal overlap between the intensification of wolf persecution documented in this report and the rise of BBB to political power is striking. The BBB entered the national coalition government in July 2024 and since 2023 holds executive power in several provinces with the highest rates of wolf disappearances, including Gelderland and Drenthe. Correlation is not causation, and it would be wrong to conclude that BBB governance has directly caused wolf persecution to intensify. What can be said is that the political environment created by these actors — one in which illegal killing is normalised, enforcement is deprioritised, and the wolf is framed as an alien presence to be eliminated — is one in which persecution is more likely to flourish.

The BBB campaign poster reproduced above (Figure 21), illustrates how this political framing operates visually. The poster depicts the wolf as a sinister predator terrorising the rural population and positions hunters as the solution, with the text: "*Vote against wolf parties. The wolf doesn't choose. It grabs. Children living in fear. Pets torn apart. Farmers and families powerless. Hunters protect. Ideologues do not. BBB. Common sense in wildlife management.*"

Some local politicians appear to go further still, actively promoting persecution. In August 2025, a party official of the local party *Gemeentebelang Nunspee*t responded to a Facebook post by a local newspaper offering guidance on what to do when encountering a wolf by posting a photograph of a wolf in the crosshairs of a rifle (Figure 20). The effect of such public demonstrations of hostility toward wolves by figures of local authority on those who are already inclined toward illegal action should not be underestimated.

▲ Figure 20 Comment by party official of Gemeentebelang Nunspeet on Facebook, August 2025.

◀ Figure 21 BBB Campaign poster, October 2025. Poster: BBB. Source: Heidi Looy, x.com/heidi_looy/status/1979085209191522747.

Photo: Tirza Verwijs

5.4

Governance and enforcement failures

5.4.1

Fragmented governance

As noted in section 3, in the Netherlands the 12 provinces are responsible for implementing wolf policies. This is due to a major decentralisation operation initiated in 2013, called the Nature Pact. This agreement made the provinces responsible for the implementation of nature policies, with the national government setting the frameworks and ambitions. The Minister for Agriculture moved further away from policy implementation, but nevertheless still holds systemic responsibility for nature policy and bears responsibility for results, for example, for achieving the goals of the Habitats Directive.

This decentralisation of Dutch nature policy gave provinces substantial discretion in how they organise and implement policy but has also led to fragmented governance and uneven approaches across the country (PBL & WUR, 2020). These differences are particularly visible in the management of contentious species such as the wolf, where provinces adopt divergent strategies, communication styles and intervention thresholds, contributing to inconsistency in policy responses and reinforcing public confusion and political contestation. The decision to make protective measures a condition for compensation discretionary rather than mandatory — adopted following political pressure, as documented in section 3.4 — is a further illustration of how political considerations have weakened what could have been a coherent national framework.
This governance arrangement sits uneasily with the ecological reality of the wolf as a highly mobile, transboundary species that routinely crosses provincial borders. The result is a structural mismatch between administrative boundaries and ecological reality. While coordination mechanisms exist through the Association of Provinces of the Netherlands (IPO), in practice they are often slow and cumbersome, as joint decision-making requires consensus among provinces whose political leadership may hold markedly different views on wolf management. This can delay timely responses to emerging incidents and lead to lowest-common-denominator compromises, rather than coherent, proactive policy. As a result, the current governance structure risks undermining both the effectiveness and the perceived legitimacy of wolf management — and, as the evidence in this report suggests, may inadvertently create the conditions in which illegal killing flourishes.

The responsible ministry (LVVN) and the provinces, acknowledging the need for greater national coordination, have made efforts to harmonise their approaches through the 2024 National Wolf Strategy (Landelijke Aanpak Wolven) and the National Wolf Information Point (Landelijk Informatiepunt Wolven), established in the autumn of 2025. As part of the National Strategy, a National Expert Team Wolf (Landelijk Deskundigenteam Wolf) is currently being established. The team will advise provinces on wolf behaviour and on appropriate interventions in the event of incidents and will assess individual cases to determine whether a wolf should be designated a ‘problem wolf’ and what measures should be taken (LVVN & IPO, 2024).

Whether these initiatives will succeed in producing the coherent, consistent national approach that wolf management in the Netherlands requires remains to be seen. Their effectiveness will depend not only on institutional coordination, but also on the willingness of provinces to subordinate local political pressures to a shared framework — a condition that, given the political dynamics documented in this report, cannot be taken for granted.

...provinces adopt divergent strategies, communication styles and intervention thresholds, contributing to inconsistency in policy responses and reinforcing public confusion and political contestation.

◂ Wolf pup, Northern Veluwe.


Photo: Steven van der Bent

5.4.2

Weak law enforcement

Respondents interviewed for this study have painted a concerning picture of the state of wildlife law enforcement in the Netherlands.

Multiple respondents highlighted that there is little to no wildlife law enforcement in rural areas [W14, W42, W43, W45, W46, W48, W52, W59]. Since the disbanding of the field police (veldpolitie) in 1993, police capacity and expertise to tackle wildlife crime has progressively been reduced. A forest ranger from Overijssel [W43] stated that the police have little expertise in, or appetite for, rural wildlife crime, concluding that the countryside has become '*one big free state*' where poachers can operate without fear of consequence. This was confirmed by another respondent, himself a hunter and retired BOA (Buitengewoon Opsporingsambtenaar – Special Investigations Officer) [W46], who stated that '*poaching is rampant. Everyone can do as they please in the countryside. I never see anyone*'.

This assessment is corroborated by external sources. A 2023 article in *Securitymanagement* noted that the police lack both the capacity and the specialist knowledge to operate effectively in rural areas. In contrast to their detailed knowledge of urban environments, natural areas represent, in the words of one expert, "*a blind spot*" (Passenier, 2023). A 2024 research report on nature supervision and enforcement capacity in Noord-Brabant reached a similar conclusion, finding that current enforcement capacity is insufficient and that in some rural areas there is now structurally no supervision or enforcement whatsoever (Frijters & Bontekoe Janssen, 2024). While this study was conducted in the province of Noord-Brabant, its findings on blind spots and insufficient capacity are relevant nationally. Tellingly, even the Koninklijke Nederlandse Jagersvereniging (KNJV) — the hunters' own association — has stated in its official position on rural safety that the current level of supervision in rural areas has fallen below an acceptable minimum and called on the government to prioritise serious forms of wildlife crime (KNJV, n.d.).

Wildlife law enforcement in rural areas is left almost entirely to so-called "green" BOAs — special investigation officers with a mandate to enforce wildlife legislation. Green BOAs are commonly employed by municipalities, provinces, land management organisations such as Staatsbosbeheer and Natuurmonumenten, and private estate owners. However, their numbers are declining. The government has introduced increasingly burdensome requirements — including expensive and time-consuming retraining obligations that few game wardens or small landowners can afford — effectively "liquidating" the part-time BOA system, thereby reducing the 'eyes and ears' in the field [W43]. The forest ranger from Overijssel expressed deep frustration that privately employed BOAs are increasingly denied access to personal data and refused necessary equipment, such as uitschuifbare wapenstokken (extendable batons) or firearms, despite conducting high-risk house searches and regularly encountering armed poachers [W43].

Concerningly, several respondents — many of them BOAs themselves — reported that some green BOAs are engaged in illegal activity [W11, W19, W28, W33, W42, W43, W46, W52]. Examples provided included the poaching of protected wildlife, shooting more specimens than permitted, falsifying game counts, and committing fraud with carcass tags. Several respondents pointed out that many green BOAs are also active hunters or employed by private estates with hunting interests, creating a conflict of interest in which they are effectively policing themselves. A hunter and retired BOA based on the Veluwe explained that game wardens employed by estate owners frequently operate under pressure to maximise huntable wildlife populations in order to further their employer's hunting interests, and that it is not uncommon for game wardens to kill predators preying on game in the estate, such as foxes and birds of prey, out of a desire to please, or under an obligation to please, the landowner [W43].

Several respondents with long experience in the field [W04, W11, W28, W42] highlighted the existence of an informal network on the Veluwe in which hunters, wildlife managers and some BOAs protect one another, ensuring that illegal acts are covered up. All declined to share further details, citing the network's influential membership and the reach of its connections. Several witnesses described conditions on some private estates on the Veluwe as a state of lawlessness, in which networks of hunters and BOAs operate outside any form of public oversight [W11, W14, W28].

At the root of this dysfunction lies a structural problem that goes beyond the specific failures documented above. Supervision and enforcement in rural and natural areas is divided across a patchwork of actors — Staatsbosbeheer, Natuurmonumenten, private landowners, provincial BOAs, environmental agencies (omgevingsdiensten) and police — each operating within their own geographic boundaries, with their own systems, and without effective coordination. Individual BOAs frequently work alone, cover impossibly large areas, lack round-the-clock coverage, and have limited powers.

The result is that reports of illegal activity are regularly received but rarely translated into concrete findings. And without concrete findings, no hard data exist — and without hard data, enforcement priority is not assigned. As one experienced enforcement professional observed, this is no different from the situation that once prevailed in road safety: it was only when intensive, systematic drink-driving controls were introduced that the scale of the problem became visible and the political case for sustained investment in enforcement could be made. The same logic applies to wildlife crime in rural areas. Until the enforcement infrastructure exists to detect, record and prosecute it, the problem will remain invisible — and its invisibility will be used as evidence that it does not exist [W45].

Taken together, the picture that emerges from this section is one of systemic enforcement failure. The progressive dismantling and fragmentation of rural wildlife law enforcement capacity, the conflicts of interest embedded in the BOA system and the culture of silence maintained by influential networks have created conditions in which illegal activity can flourish largely undetected and unpunished. In this context, wolf poaching is not an aberration but a predictable consequence: where the risk of detection is negligible, where those responsible for enforcement are sometimes complicit, and where a culture of impunity has taken root, the illegal killing of a protected species becomes, for those so inclined, a rational and low-risk choice. Restoring effective wildlife law enforcement in rural areas is therefore not a peripheral concern, but a precondition for any meaningful reduction in wolf persecution in the Netherlands

"Poaching is rampant. Everyone can do as they please in the countryside. I never see anyone."

◂ Wolf in Planken Wambuis.

5.5

Socio-cultural identity and rural values

Photo: Steven van der Bent

Wolf persecution in the Netherlands cannot be understood solely in terms of economic grievance or political rhetoric. It is also rooted in a set of deeply held socio-cultural identities and values in which the wolf functions not merely as a biological presence but as a symbol — of unwanted change, of urban imposition, and of a way of life under threat.

Ewald Engelen, professor of financial geography at the University of Amsterdam, captured this dynamic succinctly in an opinion piece in NRC: *"After the farmer, the wind turbine, the heat pump and the Tesla, the wolf has become the latest totem in the culture war between supposed city-dwellers and rural communities that surfaced with the 2019 farmer protests over nitrogen regulations"*(Engelen, 2025). Multiple witnesses corroborate this reading. Rural residents describe the wolf as something "pushed" onto them by urban elites and left-wing nature organisations who have no understanding of rural reality [W31, W39, W41]. For farmers already subject to nitrogen regulations and restrictions on grazing practices, the wolf is experienced as the final straw — *de druppel* — in a long series of government impositions on a way of life they feel is no longer valued or understood [W47, W55]. As discussed in section 5.2, conspiracy narratives circulating on social media both reflect and reinforce these deeper cultural anxieties, framing the wolf's return not as a natural process but as a deliberate act of imposition by a hostile state.

Several witnesses note that the wolf has also become a surrogate for broader anxieties about change and the arrival of "foreign elements" in the Netherlands, with explicit comparisons made to asylum seekers [W14, W17, W48]. One witness from the Noord-Veluwe observed that communities in his area are deeply discriminating toward those they consider outsiders — whether human or animal — and that the wolf is experienced as yet another unwelcome arrival that nobody asked for [W48]. This conflation of the wolf with immigration anxieties has been highlighted by Ronald van Velzen, a historian at Erasmus University Rotterdam, who argues that the wolf debate in the Netherlands is driven not by facts but by the same "fear of the other" rhetoric that characterises the migration debate — with wolves, like migrants, portrayed by populists as intruders threatening what "we" have (Van Velzen, 2025). It echoes the findings of Pates and Leser (2021) in eastern Germany, where the wolf was explicitly framed by right-wing populist actors as an "invasive species" resonating with anti-immigration sentiment — suggesting that this dynamic is not unique to the Netherlands but part of a broader European pattern.

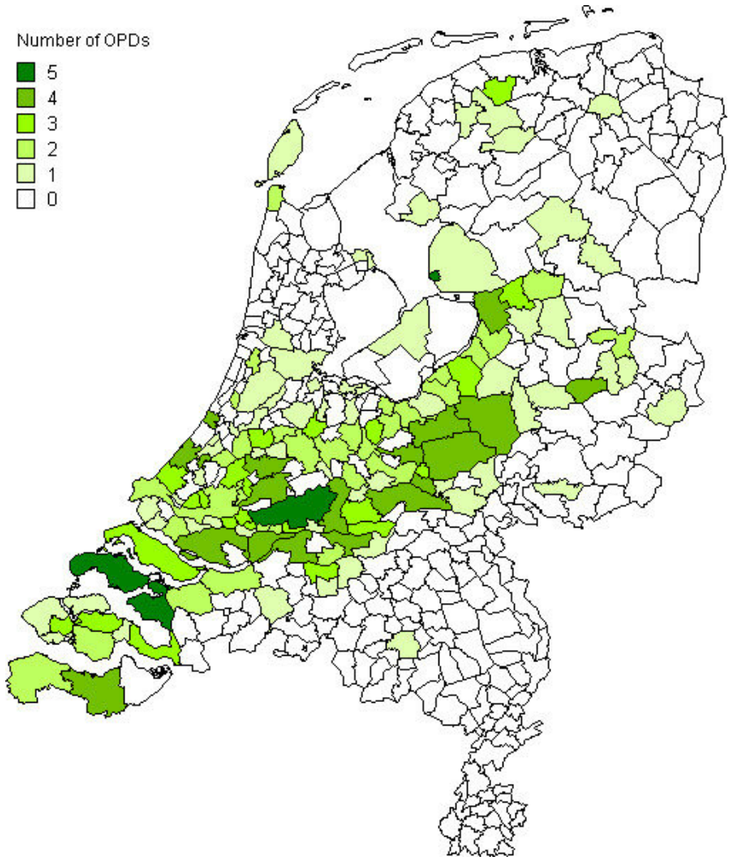
The sense of cultural loss extends beyond farming and into everyday rural life. In areas such as Putten, Heerde and Elspeet, residents describe no longer feeling safe walking their dogs or allowing their children to cycle through the woods [W35, W39, W48]. The wolf has curtailed a freedom of movement that rural residents regard as fundamental to their way of life — and one they feel city-dwellers, whom they perceive as supporters of the wolf's return, will never have to sacrifice.

As documented in section 4.3.2, hunting culture is a significant dimension of this identity complex, and the economic and lifestyle dimensions of that conflict have been examined there in detail. What is worth noting here is the broader cultural significance of hunting in affected communities. One witness described hunting as a total lifestyle — defining personal relationships, social circles centred on local pubs, family traditions and generational identity — and argued that it is precisely this totality that explains the intensity of the hostility: *"it threatens their identity as a hunter. And I understand that — if you build everything in your life around something and it is suddenly no longer possible as you were used to, that is a genuine intrusion on your personal life"* [W48].

Witnesses also describe a notable generational shift: older hunters often express a code of conduct based on what they consider proper wildlife management and are critical of a younger generation whom they describe as "cowboys" — more aggressive, less ethically restrained, and more prone to coordinating through WhatsApp groups to harass or pursue wolves [W16, W17, W44, W48, W49].

"After the farmer, the wind turbine, the heat pump and the Tesla, the wolf has become the latest totem in the culture war between supposed city-dwellers and rural communities that surfaced with the 2019 farmer protests over nitrogen regulations"

◂ A wolf of the National Park Hoge Veluwe pack, in Deelerwoud, January 2025.



In the Bible Belt, opposition to the wolf is not experienced as a policy disagreement but as a matter of moral and religious conviction — one in which the authority of the state is subordinated to a higher obligation.

Figure 22 The Bible Belt in the Netherlands, based on number of Orthodox Protestant Denominations (OPDs) per municipality. ©2011 Ruijs et al; licensee BioMed Central Ltd.

The Bible Belt

The Dutch Bible Belt refers to a geographically defined area with a relatively high concentration of orthodox Protestant communities (Ruijs et al., 2011). It is an area stretching from Zeeland in the Southwest, across the Veluwe, to Fryslân in the north (Figure 22).

In some communities of the Dutch Bible Belt — particularly around Nunspeet, Elspeet and Uddel on the northern Veluwe — resistance to the wolf takes on an explicitly theological dimension that deserves separate consideration. These are predominantly Reformed Protestant (Gereformeerde) communities with a conservative religious culture, described by multiple witnesses as closed, sectarian and often deeply suspicious of the state [W14, W36, W47, W52].

This theological dimension has deep historical roots that long predate the wolf's return to the Netherlands. In Christian Europe, the wolf became a powerful symbol of the devil — portrayed as prowling around the flock just as Satan prowled around the faithful — and was subjected to systematic persecution across the continent, not unlike the treatment of witches during the Inquisition. Both were hunted, exterminated and cast as agents of evil threatening the Christian order. This theological enmity migrated to the Americas with European settlers,who carried their hostility toward wolves into the New World and subjected them to one of history's most thorough eradication campaigns — nearly wiping out the grey wolf from the continental United States by the mid-twentieth century (Coleman, 2004). Understanding this history is essential for understanding why, in communities where Christian tradition runs deep, opposition to the wolf is experienced not merely as a policy preference but as something closer to a moral and religious conviction.

Several witnesses highlighted that faith is an important factor in the hatred of wolves widespread in Bible Belt communities [W14, W19, W42, W48, W52]. Two reported an account of a minister of an orthodox Reformed church in Elspeet who, some three to four years ago, described the wolf from the pulpit as a demon that must be eradicated [W19, W48]. Another witness noted that in strict Reformed circles the wolf is by some regarded as a heathen animal [W14].

A distinct, but related, theological argument draws on the concept of rentmeesterschap (stewardship), which in the Reformed tradition refers to humanity's calling to care for and manage God's creation. The concept is, however, interpreted in radically different ways. In some strict Reformed circles, stewardship is understood as a mandate for human dominion over nature — a licence to kill any species that is a hindrance, causes imbalance or economic damage. One respondent articulated this directly: *'Reformed people believe that humans are the stewards of nature, and from that perspective they believe they are permitted to kill wild animals such as the wolf'* [W12]. Other interviewees, including three Reformed church members and residents of the northern Veluwe, argue for the opposite interpretation — that stewardship means protecting all of creation [W12, W22, W29, W47]. One of them cited the biblical passage *'Let all that has breath, Praise the Lord'* as grounds for including the wolf within the scope of God's creation [W12].

This interpretation finds support in an unexpected quarter: a column published in the Nunspeet local paper by Reformed minister Ds. A. Schot, writing for the very community described by multiple witnesses as a centre of anti-wolf resistance. Schot argued that the wolf's predatory nature is not intrinsic but a consequence of the Fall — humanity's rupture with God having drawn all of creation into disorder — and drew on Isaiah 11 and 65 to frame the biblical vision of the wolf lying down with the lamb as a promise of the Messiah's coming Kingdom, in which neither wolf nor human will pose a threat. Rather than calling for eradication, he invited his readers to reflect on their own culpability before God (Schot, 2025). Another witness, a Reformed church member and regular visitor to farming communities on the northern Veluwe, observed that he frequently encounters livestock left entirely unprotected, effectively inviting wolf predation — and noted pointedly that the Bible's own shepherds guarded their flocks against predators through the night [W47].

The sectarian and anti-state character of these communities adds a further layer. A forest ranger working in the northern Veluwe described the local population as deeply God-fearing, secretive and practised at concealment, adding that within these communities, difficult matters — whatever their nature — are habitually kept hidden: *'They know how to cover everything up'* [W52]. A Reformed church member offered a striking parallel with past episodes of community defiance — the resistance to government intervention during the swine fever and mad cow disease outbreaks — observing that a culture of *'we don't give a damn about the government and we simply do what we want'* has taken root, which he found theologically indefensible but sociologically explicable [W47]. One witness summarised the attitude succinctly: *'They are used to sorting things out themselves and above all to shooting. Nobody is surprised by that'* [W48].

What the Bible Belt material illustrates most starkly is that in some communities, opposition to the wolf is not experienced as a policy disagreement but as a matter of moral and religious conviction — one in which the authority of the state is subordinated to a higher obligation. In such a context, the illegal killing of a wolf is not understood as a crime but as an act of righteous community self-governance. This makes these communities among the most resistant to conventional policy interventions and enforcement and underlines the need for approaches that engage with the cultural and religious dimensions of the conflict rather than treating it as a straightforward law enforcement problem.

▲ Figure 23 Campaign poster by the SGP (Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij, Reformed Political Party), which has a strong support base in the Bible Belt. Their campaign 'De wolf is geen sprookje' ('The wolf is no fairy tale') declares that 'the wolf does not belong in our villages' and sets out the SGP's position as: 'Preventing rather than curing; chasing off rather than welcoming; acting rather than putting up with it.' Source: SGP.

Discussion

Photo: Arjen Heeres

Photo: Marcel van Kammen

This study provides the first systematic investigation of wolf poaching and persecution in the Netherlands, drawing on witness testimony, social media research, open-source intelligence and an analysis of a decade of monitoring data. The principal finding is unambiguous:

wolf persecution in the Netherlands is substantially more extensive, more organised and more geographically concentrated than has been publicly acknowledged.

Two independent lines of evidence support this conclusion.

First, based on witness testimony and open-source data gathered for this study, a minimum of 41 wolves were recorded as poached between 1 October 2021 and 31 March 2026.

Second, an independent analysis of wolf monitoring data found that of the 259 wolves genetically confirmed in the Netherlands between 2015 and December 2025, 38 — nearly 15% — have disappeared without explanation from monitoring records, at a rate inconsistent with natural mortality or emigration and consistent with systematic cryptic poaching. Taken together, these two lines of evidence paint a consistent and deeply concerning picture of organised, sustained persecution operating with near-total impunity.

The evidence points not to isolated, spontaneous incidents but to a distributed, socially embedded wildlife crime infrastructure operating with near-total impunity. While persecution is most concentrated across two primary hotspots — the Veluwe and the northeastern provinces of Drenthe and Fryslân, which are also the areas where established wolf packs are currently present — incidents have been documented in all provinces where wolves occur. This infrastructure is sustained by a mutually reinforcing system of drivers: genuine human-wolf conflict, the amplifying dynamics of social media, political normalisation of illegal killing, systemic failures of governance and law enforcement, and deeply embedded socio-cultural identities in which opposition to the wolf functions as cultural resistance. The remainder of this section discusses the meaning and implications of these findings, relates them to the broader scientific literature, and acknowledges their limitations.

>14%

of wolves have disappeared without explanation from monitoring records, at a rate inconsistent with natural mortality or emigration and consistent with systematic cryptic poaching.

▲ The “mouse catcher” who disappeared without a trace in Oude Willem, Drenthe December 2023.

Photo: Anonymous, reproduced with permission.

The scale and nature of persecution

T
he nearly 15% disappearance rate identified in this report is significant not merely as a statistic, but as an indicator of the systemic nature of the problem. It means that for every seven wolves confirmed in the Netherlands, at least one has most likely been illegally killed — and that this has been happening consistently across nearly a decade, undetected and unpunished. This figure almost certainly underestimates the true scale: it captures only wolves whose DNA has been recorded, and individual-level identification is not carried out systematically. The true toll is unknown, and unknowable with current monitoring tools.

The figure of 41 wolves reported poached between October 2021 and March 2026 — itself already described as a minimum — deserves further qualification. This number is derived exclusively from the witness testimonies gathered for this study and from open-source evidence relating to the two cases in Stroe (2021) and Ugchelen (2022). It reflects only what witnesses who were willing and able to speak with the researcher were aware of, and what could be established through publicly available sources. The true number of wolves deliberately killed in the Netherlands over this period is in all probability higher. Witnesses who hold direct knowledge of specific incidents are likely a minority of those with relevant information; many poaching acts will never be reported to anyone outside the immediate circle of those involved; and the methodology of this study — based on interviews conducted over a defined period with a non-random sample of witnesses — cannot claim to have captured the full extent of illegal killing. The 41-wolf figure should therefore be understood as a floor, not an estimate of the actual scale of the problem.

A further source of underestimation deserves note: given the evidence that deliberate vehicle strikes are used as a method of killing wolves, some of the wolves recorded as traffic casualties — which account for 70% of all registered wolf deaths in the Netherlands — may in fact have been intentionally killed. If even a small proportion of traffic deaths are deliberate, the true toll of illegal killing is substantially higher than either the 41-wolf figure or the disappearance analysis suggests.

41

wolves reported poached between October 2021 and March 2026

70%

of all registered wolf deaths in the Netherland were killed by car collisions.

▲ Wolf killed by car.

This pattern of extensive but largely hidden wolf persecution is not unique to the Netherlands. Liberg et al. (2012) estimated that in Scandinavia more than two-thirds of total poaching was cryptic, and Nowak et al. (2021) documented a rapidly worsening trend in Poland as the wolf population expanded westward. In Italy, Musto et al. (2021) found that of 179 confirmed human-caused wolf deaths recorded in Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna between 2005 and 2021, 41.9% were the result of illegal killing — underscoring that persecution remains a significant driver of wolf mortality even in populations where the species has been legally protected for decades.

The parallel with densely populated, heavily cultivated landscapes elsewhere in northwestern Europe is particularly instructive. Sunde et al. (2021) found that in the Jutland peninsula — encompassing Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein — cryptic mortality was the dominant cause of wolf disappearances and concluded that the region functions as a wolf population sink primarily driven by illegal killing. The authors hypothesised that frequent encounters between wolves and wolf-averse persecutors in cultivated landscapes may cause unsustainably high mortality rates even where the majority of people respect protection laws. This hypothesis finds strong support in the Dutch evidence, where organised social networks, dense rural communities and a culture of silence appear to sustain persecution systematically — dynamics that are likely present in other affected countries but that this study has been able to document in unusual detail.

The organised nature of the persecution is itself a finding of considerable significance. Sollund (2017), analysing a Norwegian case of coordinated illegal wolf killing, argues that organised group persecution should be understood as organised crime rather than mere “folk crime” — a framing with direct implications for how enforcement authorities and courts approach such cases. Skogen et al. (2021) found that hunters’ unwillingness to report illegal wolf killing is driven not primarily by the low risk of detection but by political resistance rooted in distrust of institutions and identification with a rural counterpublic — meaning that simply increasing enforcement presence or raising penalties is unlikely to be sufficient where persecution is embedded in political identity and social solidarity. Both findings resonate strongly with the Dutch evidence presented in this report. Where persecution is embedded in social networks with codes of silence, financial incentives, and the tacit or active support of community leaders, dismantling it requires interventions at the level of the network, not just the individual.

The evidence that primary perpetrators are drawn from two overlapping groups — livestock farmers and hunters, connected by dense social networks and (in the northeastern provinces and the Achterhoek) reinforced by the norm of noaberschap — is important for the same reason. It means that the problem cannot be addressed by targeting one group in isolation, and that the social infrastructure through which individual grievances become collective illegal action must itself be a focus of any effective response.

The active rejection of protective measures by the large majority of affected livestock owners is perhaps the most consequential finding for coexistence policy. It demonstrates that the conflict is not simply being imposed on unwilling but compliant farmers — it is being actively sustained by a refusal to adapt, which in turn shapes wolf behaviour in ways that perpetuate and intensify the conflict.

This creates a circular dynamic: unprotected livestock attracts wolf predation, wolf predation generates grievance, grievance fuels persecution, and persecution removes wolves indiscriminately — including those that posed no threat to livestock — while doing nothing to address the conditions that drive wolf predation in the first place (see Figure 24). Breaking this cycle requires addressing not just the symptom — livestock losses — but the underlying refusal to adopt protective measures, which the evidence in this report suggests is often as much a political stance as a practical choice.

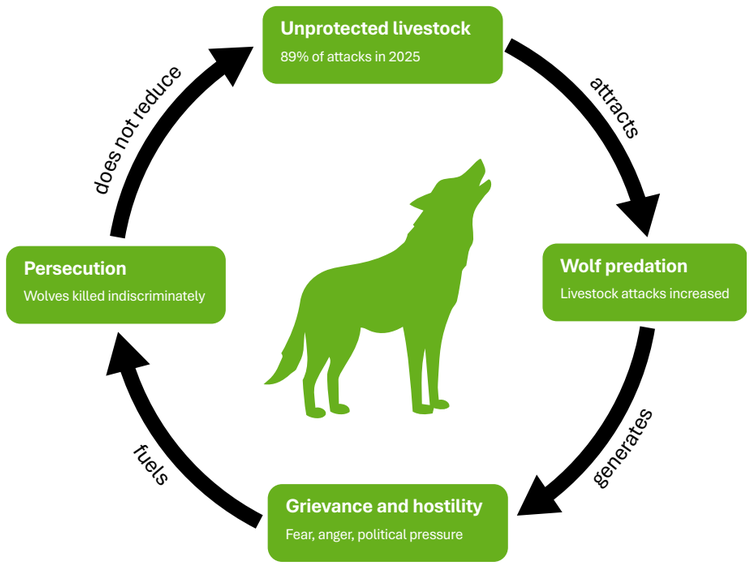


Figure 24 A self-perpetuating cycle: how unprotected livestock, wolf predation, grievance and persecution reinforce one another.


Photo: Arjen Heeres.

It should also be acknowledged that for some livestock owners, the practical obstacles to adequate protection are genuine and structural — including the intensive nature of Dutch livestock farming, with some of the highest livestock densities in the world and herd management practices that can make effective wolf-proofing difficult or impossible. Addressing these deeper structural issues — including herd size, grazing practices and land use — falls outside the scope of this report but is part of any serious long-term vision for sustainable coexistence between livestock farming and wildlife in the Netherlands (Remkes et al., 2020; Bos et al., 2023).

Why wolf persecution matters — beyond population numbers

A question that merits direct address is whether the scale of persecution documented in this report is cause for serious concern given that the Dutch wolf population continues to grow. The answer is yes, based on several distinct grounds.

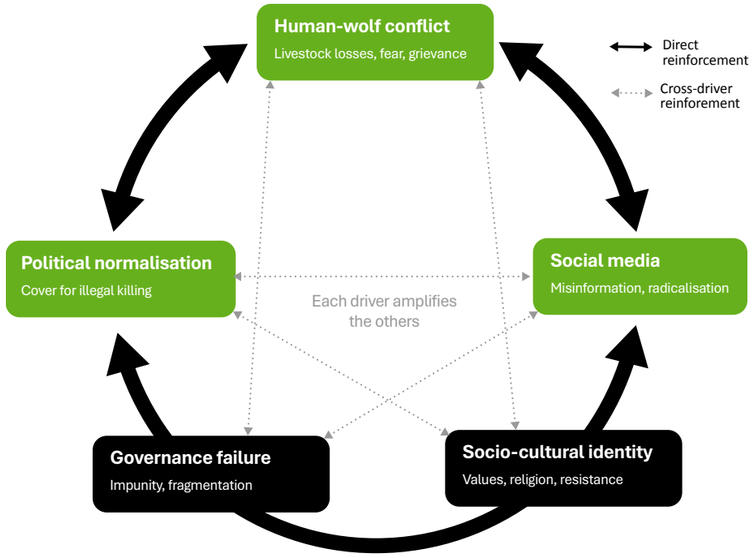
First, there is the straightforward matter of legality. Wolf persecution is a serious criminal offence under both Dutch and European law. A society in which wildlife crime is normalised, in which perpetrators operate with near-total impunity, and in which political actors lend legitimacy to illegal behaviour is one in which the rule of law is being eroded. This is a concern that extends well beyond wolves.

Second, poaching removes animals indiscriminately, disrupts pack structures, and systematically reduces the effective population size in ways that increase the risk of inbreeding and reduce long-term adaptive capacity — consequences that aggregate growth figures conceal. In a small and relatively young population such as that of the Netherlands, this is not a trivial concern.

Third, persecution is manifestly not reducing conflict — the stated justification for it. Wolf attacks on livestock have increased tenfold since 2020, the same period during which persecution has intensified. The conditions that drive livestock losses are the failure to adopt protective measures and the behavioural consequences of that failure for wolves, not the size of the wolf population. Removing individual wolves addresses neither.
Finally, with the planned downlisting of wolf protection status, persecution risks intensifying further. Research suggests that reduced legal protection increases cryptic poaching by signalling to would-be perpetrators that wolves are less valued and enforcement less likely (Louchouarn et al., 2021). The window for establishing an effective coexistence framework before this dynamic takes hold is narrowing.

Reduced legal protection may increase cryptic poaching by signalling to would-be perpetrators that wolves are less valued and enforcement less likely

▲ Wolf pack, Zuidwest Veluwe.



Drivers: a mutually reinforcing system

The five drivers identified in this report do not merely coexist — they actively reinforce one another in ways that make the problem self-perpetuating and resistant to single-issue solutions (see Figure 25). This is the central analytical finding of the drivers section, and it has a direct implication: interventions that address only one or two drivers while leaving others in place are unlikely to produce lasting change.

Economic grievances provide the initial fuel, but they do not alone explain the intensity or persistence of the conflict. As Zscheischler and Friedrich (2022) demonstrate in the German context, aggrieved parties tend to remain opposed to wolf recolonisation even where extensive compensation measures are in place, because the conflict is driven as much by non-material costs — perceived loss of quality of life, fear and diminished sense of control — as by economic loss. This finding is important because it implies that the instinct to solve the wolf conflict through compensation and subsidies, while necessary, will be insufficient. What is needed alongside material support is a restoration of the sense of agency and control that many rural communities feel they have lost — a much more difficult and longer-term challenge.

Social media transforms individual grievance into collective hostility at scale. The significance of this finding is not simply that misinformation circulates — it is that the platforms on which it circulates are structurally designed to reward emotional intensity over accuracy, making the problem self-reinforcing and extremely difficult to correct through conventional communication strategies. As Komi (2025) argues, anti-wolf communities have constructed alternative epistemic frameworks in which scientific evidence is not merely disbelieved, but actively delegitimised. Conventional communication strategies that rely on providing accurate information and trusting people to update their beliefs are therefore unlikely to be effective. What is needed instead are strategies that work with trusted intermediaries within affected communities, that acknowledge legitimate grievances while challenging misinformation, and that address the underlying sense of political alienation that makes conspiracy thinking attractive in the first place.

The political dimension is critical precisely because it operates at the level of legitimacy rather than legality. Politicians who publicly express understanding for those who take the law into their own hands are not committing a crime — but they are providing moral cover for those who do. This is consistent with findings from Germany (Clemm von Hohenberg & Hager, 2022; Pates & Leser, 2021; Zscheischler & Friedrich, 2022), Norway (Skogen et al., 2021) and Finland (Pohja-Mykrä, 2016), where the politicisation of the wolf debate has similarly been associated with increased tolerance for illegal killing. What is notable in the Dutch case is the degree of explicitness with which elected officials have blurred the line between legitimate opposition and normalisation of illegal killing — and the complete absence of political consequences for doing so. This absence of accountability is itself a driver of the problem and is likely not unique to the Netherlands.

Governance failures and the culture of impunity they have produced are perhaps the most tractable of the drivers identified, in the sense that they are most directly within the reach of policy intervention. The dismantling of rural wildlife law enforcement capacity over the past three decades has not been inevitable — it has been a series of political choices, and those choices can be reversed. The significance of the impunity finding is that it demonstrates the inadequacy of relying on the threat of prosecution as a deterrent when the probability of detection approaches zero. Effective deterrence requires not only that penalties exist on paper, but that they are credibly enforced — a condition that, on current evidence, is far from being met.

▲ Figure 25 Wolf persecution in the Netherlands is sustained by five mutually reinforcing drivers. Solid lines indicate direct reinforcement between adjacent drivers; dashed lines indicate cross-driver reinforcement.

Photo: Arjen Heeres

The socio-cultural and theological dimensions of the conflict are the most resistant to policy intervention precisely because they are rooted in identity rather than interest. The significance of the *noaberschap* and Bible Belt findings is that they identify communities and mechanisms through which opposition to the wolf has become inseparable from who people are and how they live — not a policy preference that can be changed by adjusting incentives, but a deeply held conviction that is among the most resistant to conventional policy instruments.

The risk that wolves pose to humans

The statistical risk that wolves pose to human safety is vanishingly small — research covering 2002–2020 found evidence for just 12 attacks on humans across Europe and North America, of which two were fatal (Linnell et al., 2021) — yet fear of wolves is a genuine and significant feature of public sentiment and a major driver of both political mobilisation and individual decisions to take the law into one's own hands. Incidents of bold wolf behaviour — most notably the repeated encounters between wolf Bram and members of the public on the Utrechtse Heuvelrug in 2024 and 2025 — demonstrate that the risk, while statistically small, is not theoretical. This risk is compounded where wolves have become habituated to humans, for example through deliberate feeding, which can significantly increase the likelihood of bold and potentially dangerous behaviour. Effective management responses are essential both for public safety and for maintaining public confidence in wolf policy. As Bruskotter and Wilson (2014) note, perceived risk is not a function of actual danger, but of social trust in managing authorities and perceived control over wildlife hazards. The implication is important: presenting people with risk statistics will not reduce fear if they do not trust the institutions presenting them. Rebuilding that trust is therefore both a communications challenge and a governance one — and it reinforces the case made throughout this report that establishing effective, credible and consistent wolf policy is among the most important preconditions for reducing conflict.

Establishing effective, credible and consistent wolf policy is among the most important preconditions for reducing conflict.

▲ Two young wolves on farmland, Zuidwest Veluwe.

Photo: Arjen Heeres

The case against culling

A recurring demand across the communities and political actors documented in this report is that there are too many wolves in the Netherlands and that those considered a nuisance must be "managed" — a term that in practice functions as a euphemism for culling. This demand deserves particular scrutiny, not least because the scale of poaching documented in this report is not acknowledged in discussions about whether culling should be permitted.

The scientific evidence suggests lethal wolf control does not reliably reduce livestock losses (Kutal et al., 2024; Treves et al., 2025). Beyond its ineffectiveness, lethal control may actively worsen conflict: human-caused mortality destabilises pack structures, significantly reducing the odds that a pack will persist and reproduce (Cassidy et al., 2023), and disrupted packs are less able to hunt wild prey effectively — increasing the likelihood that surviving wolves turn to livestock. The implication is profound: the dominant political response to the wolf conflict in the Netherlands is not only legally problematic, but ecologically counterproductive.

Permitting culling would not reduce livestock losses — it would likely increase them, while simultaneously providing political legitimacy to a management approach that the evidence consistently shows to be ineffective. The Dutch experience itself illustrates this: wolf attacks on livestock have increased tenfold since 2020, the same period during which this report documents an intensification of illegal killing. Whether or not this increase in attacks is only a symptom of an increasing wolf population or, at least partially, a response to increased indiscriminate mortality, it is clear increased illegal killing has not reduced livestock attacks. Addressing these dynamics will require not only a rethinking of enforcement and governance, but also an honest public reckoning with the evidence on what does and does not work — a challenge that the conclusions and recommendations seek to address.

There is a further, particularly pertinent consideration given the planned downlisting of wolf protection status in the Netherlands. Research on Mexican wolves found that animals were 121% more likely to disappear — almost certainly through cryptic poaching — during periods of reduced legal protections than during periods of stricter protection (Louchouarn et al., 2021). The proposed mechanism is a policy signal effect: reducing legal protections lowers the perceived value of wolves in the eyes of the public, including would-be poachers, and signals a reduced likelihood of enforcement against poaching (Chapron & Treves, 2016, as cited in Louchouarn et al., 2021). Social scientific studies from Wisconsin corroborate this: tolerance for wolves decreased, and stated intention to poach increased, as wolf-killing was progressively liberalised between 2003 and 2013.

In the Dutch context, where a culture of impunity already exists and where the social and political environment already normalises illegal killing, the planned weakening of wolf protection status risks further emboldening those who are already engaged in or sympathetic to persecution. The evidence suggests that stronger protection, consistently enforced, is what reduces poaching — not weaker protection.

▲ Wolf with young, Zuidwest Veluwe.

Photo: Arjen Heeres

Limitations

This research has several limitations. First, the phenomenon under investigation is by definition covert: witnesses self-select, and the most serious activity is likely the least visible. The findings should be read as a lower-bound picture. Second, individual testimonies cannot always be independently verified; where possible, accounts have been cross-referenced against other testimonies, open-source material or monitoring data. Third, the incident map is indicative rather than precise, and should be read as a guide to geographic patterns. Fourth, the disappearance analysis captures only wolves whose DNA has been recorded, likely underestimating the true scale of cryptic poaching. Fifth, the social media research was conducted through passive observation and is not a statistically representative sample. Notwithstanding these limitations, the convergence of multiple independent lines of evidence — monitoring data, witness testimony, open-source intelligence and social media research — provides a body of evidence that is internally consistent, geographically specific and difficult to explain on any basis other than systematic and organised persecution, consistent with findings from comparable studies elsewhere in Europe.

Looking ahead

The wolf population in the Netherlands is growing and its range is expanding. Without a fundamental change in the conditions that currently enable persecution to flourish — inadequate law enforcement, fragmented governance, a political climate that normalises illegal killing, and deeply embedded cultural resistance — the trajectory documented in this report is likely to continue.

The 2024 National Wolf Strategy (Landelijke Aanpak Wolven) and the nascent national coordination mechanisms represent a step in the right direction, but their effectiveness will depend on consistent implementation, adequate resourcing and the political will to hold perpetrators to account. The conclusions and recommendations that follow seek to identify, on the basis of the evidence presented in this report, the most critical changes needed to bring that trajectory to an end.

▲ Wolf, Zuidwest Veluwe.

Conclusions and recommendations

Photo: Arjen Heeres

Photo: Arjen Heeres

7.1

Conclusions

This report set out to investigate the nature, scale and drivers of wolf poaching and persecution in the Netherlands. Its findings are unambiguous and deeply concerning.

Wolf persecution in the Netherlands is far more extensive than publicly acknowledged. A minimum of 41 wolves were reported poached between October 2021 and March 2026, based on witness testimonies gathered for this study and open-source evidence relating to the cases in Stroe (2021) and Ugchelen (2022). This figure almost certainly underestimates the true scale: it reflects only what witnesses who were willing and able to speak with the researcher were aware of, and what could be established through publicly available sources. The true number of wolves deliberately killed over this period is in all probability substantially higher.

The monitoring data corroborate this conclusion. Of the 259 wolves genetically confirmed in the Netherlands between 2015 and December 2025, 38 — nearly 15% — have disappeared without explanation from monitoring records. This rate is inconsistent with natural mortality or emigration and is consistent with systematic cryptic poaching. For every seven wolves confirmed in the Netherlands, at least one has most likely been illegally killed — and this has been happening consistently across nearly a decade, undetected and unpunished. Given that individual-level DNA identification is not carried out systematically, the true disappearance rate is likely higher still.

Persecution is organised, geographically concentrated and socially embedded. What this report documents is not a collection of isolated spontaneous incidents, but a distributed wildlife crime infrastructure operating with near-total impunity. Persecution is most intensive in two primary hotspots — the Veluwe and the northeastern provinces of Drenthe and Fryslân — but incidents have been documented in all provinces where wolves are present. Methods include shooting with hunting rifles and unregulated high-powered air rifles equipped with thermal imaging and night-vision technology; vehicle pursuit and deliberate run-overs; poisoning; and baiting. Carcasses are systematically disposed of through burial, disposal in slurry pits, incineration, and submersion in water bodies — techniques chosen specifically to eliminate biological evidence and prevent detection.

Livestock farmers and hunters are the primary perpetrators, operating within overlapping networks. The evidence consistently points to two overlapping groups: livestock farmers, motivated primarily by livestock losses, frustration with government policy and financial pressure; and hunters, motivated by competition for game, the economic value of hunting rights, and a cultural identity that positions the wolf as both competitor and intruder. The two groups are connected by dense social networks and, particularly in the northeastern provinces, by the norm of noaberschap — the traditional obligation of neighbourly duty — which transforms individual grievances into collective illegal action. The coordination of persecution activity through social media platforms, particularly the Geen Wolf network, provides a distributed operational infrastructure that is difficult to monitor and to prosecute.

The active rejection of protective measures is both a symptom and a driver of the conflict. In 2025, 89% of wolf attacks on livestock involved animals with no protective measures in place — a proportion essentially unchanged since 2020, despite a more than tenfold increase in attacks over this period. For many livestock owners, the refusal to install protective fencing is not merely a practical choice but a political one: an act of resistance against the wolf's presence and the policy framework that permits it. This has direct ecological consequences, teaching wolves that domestic animals are an accessible prey source and that fences can be overcome, thereby intensifying the very conflict that drives persecution.

Five mutually reinforcing drivers sustain this infrastructure. Genuine economic and practical grievances among livestock farmers provide the initial fuel. Social media amplifies and radicalises these grievances through well-documented dynamics: misinformation spreads faster than corrections, algorithms reward emotional intensity, and anti-wolf communities have built closed worldviews in which facts make little impression. Political actors — particularly populist and conservative parties at local, provincial and national level — have contributed to a climate in which illegal killing is normalised, not through explicit endorsement, but through the consistent framing of the wolf as an alien presence, through demands for policies that are either unlawful or unsupported by evidence, and through the absence of political condemnation of the persecution documented in this report. Fragmented governance and the progressive dismantling of rural wildlife law enforcement capacity have created conditions in which poaching carries negligible risk of detection or prosecution. Finally, and perhaps most durably, opposition to the wolf is embedded in socio-cultural identities — including the hunting lifestyle, the norm of noaberschap, and in Bible Belt communities a theological conviction rooted in a contested interpretation of rentmeesterschap — that are not amenable to conventional policy instruments.

The dominant political response to the wolf conflict is unsupported by evidence and ecologically counterproductive. A recurring demand across the communities and political actors documented in this report is that there are too many wolves in the Netherlands and that those considered a nuisance must be culled. The scientific evidence, however, suggests lethal wolf control does not reliably reduce livestock losses (Kutal et al., 2024; Treves et al., 2025). Beyond its ineffectiveness, culling may actively worsen conflict: human-caused mortality destabilises pack structures, reducing the ability of surviving wolves to hunt wild prey effectively and increasing the likelihood that they turn to livestock (Cassidy et al., 2023). Permitting culling would not reduce livestock losses — it would likely increase them, while simultaneously providing political legitimacy to a management approach that the evidence consistently shows to be ineffective.

The planned weakening of wolf protection status in the Netherlands carries an additional risk that has received no attention in the public debate. Research on wolf populations in the United States found that periods of reduced legal protection were associated with a 121% increase in wolf disappearances attributable to cryptic poaching, through a policy signal effect in which weaker protections lower the perceived value of wolves and signal a reduced likelihood of enforcement (Louchouarn et al., 2021). In a country where a culture of impunity already exists and enforcement capacity is inadequate, reducing legal protections risks significantly worsening the persecution this report documents.

Wolf persecution in the Netherlands is not an aberration. The patterns documented in this report — organised illegal killing embedded in rural social networks, the use of cryptic poaching methods to avoid detection, political normalisation of illegal killing, and cultural resistance rooted in identity — are consistent with findings from comparable studies in Sweden (Liberg et al., 2012), Poland (Nowak et al., 2021), Italy (Musto et al., 2021), Denmark (Sunde et al., 2021), Norway (Sollund, 2017; Skogen et al., 2021) and Finland (Pohja-Mykrä, 2016). What distinguishes the Dutch case is not that these dynamics are unique, but that this study has been able to document them in unusual detail — and that the Netherlands, as one of the most densely populated and intensively cultivated countries in Europe, faces a particularly acute version of the challenge of coexistence.

The wolf is not going away. The Dutch wolf population is growing and its range is expanding. The 2024 National Wolf Strategy (Landelijke Aanpak Wolven) and the nascent national coordination mechanisms represent a step in the right direction, but they will be insufficient without a fundamental change in the conditions that enable persecution to flourish. Neither wolves nor the legal framework that protects them will disappear as a result of political pressure or illegal killing. What illegal killing does accomplish is the removal of individual animals at a considerable cost to wolf population viability, the deepening of conflict, and the erosion of public trust in the institutions responsible for managing it. For coexistence to become a reality rather than a political aspiration, the conditions documented in this report — impunity, fragmented governance, political normalisation of illegal killing, and the wide-scale failure to adopt protective measures — must be addressed directly, comprehensively and without further delay.

◂ Wolves, Zuidwest Veluwe.

7.2

Recommendations

The conclusions of this report point to a set of specific, actionable recommendations addressed to the institutions and actors best placed to act on them.

Photo: Arjen Heeres

Wolf, Zuidwest Veluwe.

To the national government

(LVVN and the Ministry of Justice and Security)

Acknowledge the scale of wolf persecution and act on it.

The national government should formally recognise that wolf persecution constitutes serious wildlife crime, make combating it an explicit national enforcement priority, and take the concrete steps set out below.

Rebuild rural wildlife law enforcement capacity.

The progressive dismantling of rural wildlife law enforcement has created the conditions of impunity in which wolf persecution flourishes. Rebuilding this capacity requires dedicated investment: allocating sufficient resources for police and law enforcement agencies to hire and train dedicated wildlife crime staff; increasing the number and resources of green BOAs and providing them with the equipment and legal powers to operate effectively; and supporting cooperation and joint operations across law enforcement networks.

Establish the National Expert Team Wolf without further delay.

The national government should ensure that the National Expert Team Wolf (Landelijk Deskundigenteam Wolf) is operational as soon as possible, with a strong mandate and the resources necessary to fulfil it.

Expand funding to provinces for livestock protection.

EU state aid rules explicitly permit Member States to provide full (100%) compensation for both direct and indirect costs associated with coexistence with large carnivores, including preventive measures such as fencing and livestock-guarding dogs. LVVN should expand funding to provinces to enable them to offer livestock owners in wolf territories full reimbursement of eligible costs.

Provide structural funding for wolf fencing support initiatives.

The Wolf Fencing Team Belgium, established in 2019, demonstrates what is possible: none of its adapted wolf-deterrent fences have been breached by wolves, and livestock damage decreased by nearly 45% between 2018 and 2024 in its operating area (European Commission, 2025). Comparable initiatives exist in the Netherlands — Wolf Fencing Nederland and Wolf Fencing Team Zuid Nederland — but have lacked the structural funding needed to operate at scale. The national government should provide multi-year funding to support and expand these initiatives across all provinces where wolves are present.

Initiate a genuine, structured dialogue with affected rural communities.

The RDA's 2024 advisory report concluded that the social and emotional dimensions of the wolf conflict have been systematically neglected and that structured dialogue is essential — but this has not been initiated. The national government should commission and fund an ongoing, professionally facilitated dialogue process with affected communities — farmers, hunters, rural residents, local authorities and community organisations — designed with the involvement of social scientists with expertise in human-wildlife conflict. This process should not be a one-off consultation but a sustained engagement — one that prioritises genuine two-way dialogue over one-directional communication, that creates space for affected communities to be heard and to contribute to developing solutions, and that is designed with the involvement of social scientists with expertise in human-wildlife conflict and polarised community dynamics, in line with internationally recognised best practice for human-wildlife conflict resolution (IUCN, 2023). The goal is not to persuade communities to accept wolves, but to rebuild the trust in institutions and the sense of agency that the evidence in this report identifies as preconditions for any meaningful reduction in conflict.

Acknowledge that weakening wolf protection risks fuelling persecution.

The planned downlisting of wolf protection status carries a risk that has received no attention in the public debate: research shows that periods of reduced legal protection are associated with significant increases in cryptic poaching, through a policy signal effect in which weaker protections lower the perceived value of wolves and reduce the perceived risk of illegal killing (Louchouarn et al., 2021).

Develop a long-term land use vision that takes wolf coexistence into account.

Rather than managing wolf-related conflict as an isolated crisis, the national government should develop a coherent long-term vision for land use, agriculture and nature in the Netherlands — one that takes explicit account of the presence of wolves and other large carnivores, and that addresses the structural incompatibilities between intensive livestock farming and coexistence with wildlife. Wageningen University & Research has identified six fundamental dilemmas that must be resolved in order to achieve a sustainable future for agriculture and nature in the Netherlands (Bos et al., 2023). The wolf conflict is both a symptom of the failure to resolve these dilemmas and an additional reason why their resolution is urgent.

To provincial governments

Harmonise wolf policy implementation.
Provinces should work within the IPO framework to harmonise compensation levels, subsidy schemes, enforcement capacity and practical support, with the national government providing resources to bring all provinces up to best practice standards.

Invest in proactive conflict prevention.
Provinces should identify areas where wolf territories are likely to expand and begin engagement with local communities, municipalities and key target audiences before wolves arrive — before the first attack, before the first social media storm, and before positions have hardened.

Reform the compensation framework.
Compensation should be made conditional on the implementation of adequate protective measures within designated wolf territories. Compensation procedures should be accelerated and administrative burdens reduced. The range of covered costs — including personnel costs for fence installation and maintenance — should be extended to 100% of eligible costs, in line with the full reimbursement EU state aid rules permit.

Engage constructively with rural communities.
Provincial governments, in collaboration with municipalities, should go beyond information provision to initiate genuine dialogue with farmers, hunters and rural residents. Engagement with Bible Belt communities should where possible involve trusted local intermediaries rather than relying solely on government communication channels.

Ensure a sufficient wild prey base for wolves.
Provinces should review their zero-tolerance policies for large ungulates in areas with established wolf presence and consider whether a more flexible approach — allowing limited numbers of wild prey animals to persist in areas adjoining wolf territories — could reduce predation pressure on livestock and contribute to more sustainable coexistence. Any revision should be developed in consultation with farmers, landowners, hunters and nature managers, and be accompanied by monitoring to assess its effect on wolf behaviour and livestock losses.

To municipalities

Facilitate livestock owners in adapting to wolf presence.
Municipalities should review and where necessary adjust zoning regulations to allow livestock owners to construct the outbuildings needed to protect their animals. Where adjustments are in process, municipalities should apply administrative tolerance (gedoogbeleid) toward structures erected for livestock protection, rather than enforcing regulations that prevent owners from meeting their legal duty of care.

To law enforcement agencies and the public prosecutor's office

Treat wolf persecution as a priority wildlife crime.
Police forces in areas with established wolf populations should designate wolf poaching and persecution as an enforcement priority, with dedicated staff and resources.

Enhance intelligence-led approaches.
Given the organised, network-based nature of wolf persecution and the codes of silence that prevent conventional evidence-gathering, law enforcement agencies should develop intelligence-led approaches — including informants, undercover operations, and monitoring of social media platforms and digital communication networks.

Strengthen interagency collaboration.
Collaboration between police and other agencies responsible for wildlife protection compliance — including provinces, municipalities and green BOAs — should be strengthened and where necessary formalised.

Encourage public reporting.
Launch a campaign calling on the public to report suspected wolf poaching and wildlife crime to the police or Meld Misdaad Anoniem (the Dutch Anonymous Crime Tipline).

Prosecute wolf poaching to the full extent of the law.
Public prosecutors should treat wolf poaching cases as serious criminal offences, pursue prosecution vigorously, and ensure penalties are adequate to serve as a genuine deterrent. Where evidence points to coordination between multiple perpetrators, organised crime frameworks should be considered.

To hunters' organisations

Take public responsibility for the role of hunters in wolf persecution.
Hunters' organisations, including the KNJV and NOJG (Nederlandse Organisatie voor Jacht- en Grondbeheer), should take an unequivocal public stance against wolf persecution, communicate this clearly to its members, and actively cooperate with law enforcement investigations. Hunters found to have engaged in or facilitated wolf persecution should have their membership revoked.

◂ Figure 26 Image of dead wolf with hunting rifle posted by a hunter from Limburg on his FB page.

▲ Wolf hunting for rodents on farmland, Zuidwest Veluwe.

To farmers' organisations

Promote protective measures and reject vigilantism.

Farmers' organisations should actively encourage their members to implement available protective measures and engage constructively with the coexistence framework. They should communicate unambiguously that taking the law into one's own hands is not a legitimate response to human-wolf conflict — regardless of the frustration that drives it — and that illegal killing does not solve the underlying problem and exposes individuals to serious criminal liability.

To social media platforms

Take active responsibility for content that incites wildlife crime.

Meta, as operator of Facebook and WhatsApp, should treat wildlife crime incitement as a violation of its community standards and invest in proactive moderation of content promoting wolf persecution. Other platforms where similar activity is identified should be held to the same standard.

To news media and journalists

Report on wolves responsibly and accurately.

Media coverage of wolves has at times fuelled the persecutory narrative documented in this report through sensationalist and one-sided reporting. News media organisations and journalists have a professional responsibility to report on wolves accurately and in context — seeking expert scientific comment alongside farmer and hunter perspectives, contextualising attack statistics within the broader picture of wolf population dynamics and avoiding headlines that misrepresent the risk wolves pose to human safety.

To conservation and animal welfare organisations

Play an active role in promoting coexistence.

Conservation and animal welfare organisations should take an active supporting role in the practical work of coexistence — assisting with the promotion of protective measures, leveraging membership networks to communicate accessible information about living with wolves, and contributing to community dialogue processes. Organisations with credibility in rural communities have a particular role to play as trusted intermediaries.

Final observation

Whether welcomed or not, the wolf is back. It arrived because legal protection, habitat recovery and prey availability made it possible — the same conditions that have enabled wolf recovery across Europe. The question facing Dutch society is not whether to tolerate the wolf's presence, but how to manage that presence in a way that is lawful, evidence-based, and fair to both the communities most affected and the species itself. The evidence in this report suggests that the Netherlands is currently far from meeting any of those three standards. The recommendations above are offered in the hope that this can change.

The question facing Dutch society is not whether to tolerate the wolf's presence, but how to manage that presence in a way that is lawful, evidence-based, and fair to both the communities most affected and the species itself.

Appendices

Photo: Erik de Jonge

Photo: Arjen Heeres

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Wolves recorded in the Netherlands 2015-2025

Dates refer to first and last DNA confirmation in the Netherlands. Wolves classified as "Disappeared" have not had their DNA confirmed for more than six months.

Sources: BIJ12 data on wolf sightings and livestock attacks (status 10 April 2026); BIJ12 Annual Report Wolves 2025. Compiled by the authors.

Nr.	Individual	Origin	First confirmed	Last confirmed	Status
1	GW368m	Münster (DE)	07/03/2015	09/03/2015	Traffic casualty
2	GW620f	Ueckermünde (DE)	02/09/2016	03/09/2016	Disappeared
3	GW657m	Cuxhaven (DE)	03/03/2017	03/03/2017	Traffic casualty
4	GW843m	Babben - Wannichen (DE)	07/11/2017	14/11/2017	Traffic casualty
5	GW680f	Lübtheen (DE)	23/12/2017	31/12/2017	Unknown
6	GW955m	Barnstorf (DE)	23/02/2018	23/02/2018	Disappeared
7	GW913m	Barnstorf (DE)	05/03/2018	05/03/2018	Traffic casualty
8	GW954f	Schneverdingen (DE)	18/03/2018	05/04/2018	Left the Netherlands
9	GW953m	Unknown	18/03/2018	31/03/2018	Disappeared
10	GW763f	Daubitz (DE)	04/04/2018	04/04/2018	Left the Netherlands
11	GW998f	Babben - Wannichen (DE)	03/05/2018	08/09/2025	Resident
12	GW979m	Unknown	20/06/2018	25/01/2021	Traffic casualty
13	GW960f	Göhrde (DE)	29/08/2018	02/06/2023	Found dead
14	GW1401f	Unknown	03/10/2018	18/10/2018	Left the Netherlands
15	GW912f	Walle (DE)	02/12/2018	02/12/2018	Left the Netherlands
16	GW893m	Enschede/Rheinmetall (DE)	05/01/2019	09/09/2025	Resident
17	GW965f	Die Lucie (DE)	22/02/2019	22/02/2019	Left the Netherlands
18	GW849f	Ueckermünde (DE)	29/03/2019	29/03/2019	Disappeared
19	GW1428m	Noord - Veluwe	09/10/2019	12/09/2025	Resident
20	GW1261m	Unknown	21/11/2019	28/07/2020	Left the Netherlands
21	GW1479f	Göhrde (DE)	18/12/2019	19/12/2019	Left the Netherlands
22	GW1625m	Alpine population (FR)	11/02/2020	09/07/2023	Disappeared
23	GW1626m	Noord - Veluwe	04/03/2020	04/03/2020	Traffic casualty
24	GW1608m	Rodewald (DE)	21/03/2020	30/03/2020	Left the Netherlands
25	GW1554m	Herzlake (DE)	18/04/2020	30/05/2020	Shot (illegal)
26	GW1729f	Noord - Veluwe	20/06/2020	06/03/2021	Traffic casualty
27	GW1889m	Noord - Veluwe	22/09/2020	29/01/2023	Disappeared
28	GW1920m	Alpine population (FR)	14/11/2020	29/11/2020	Disappeared
29	GW1490m	Rodewald (DE)	26/11/2020	01/10/2021	Shot (illegal)
30	GW1964m	Noord - Veluwe	19/01/2021	22/12/2021	Traffic casualty
31	GW2088m	Noord - Veluwe	14/02/2021	14/02/2021	Disappeared
32	GW2087m	Noord - Veluwe	16/03/2021	05/04/2024	Resident

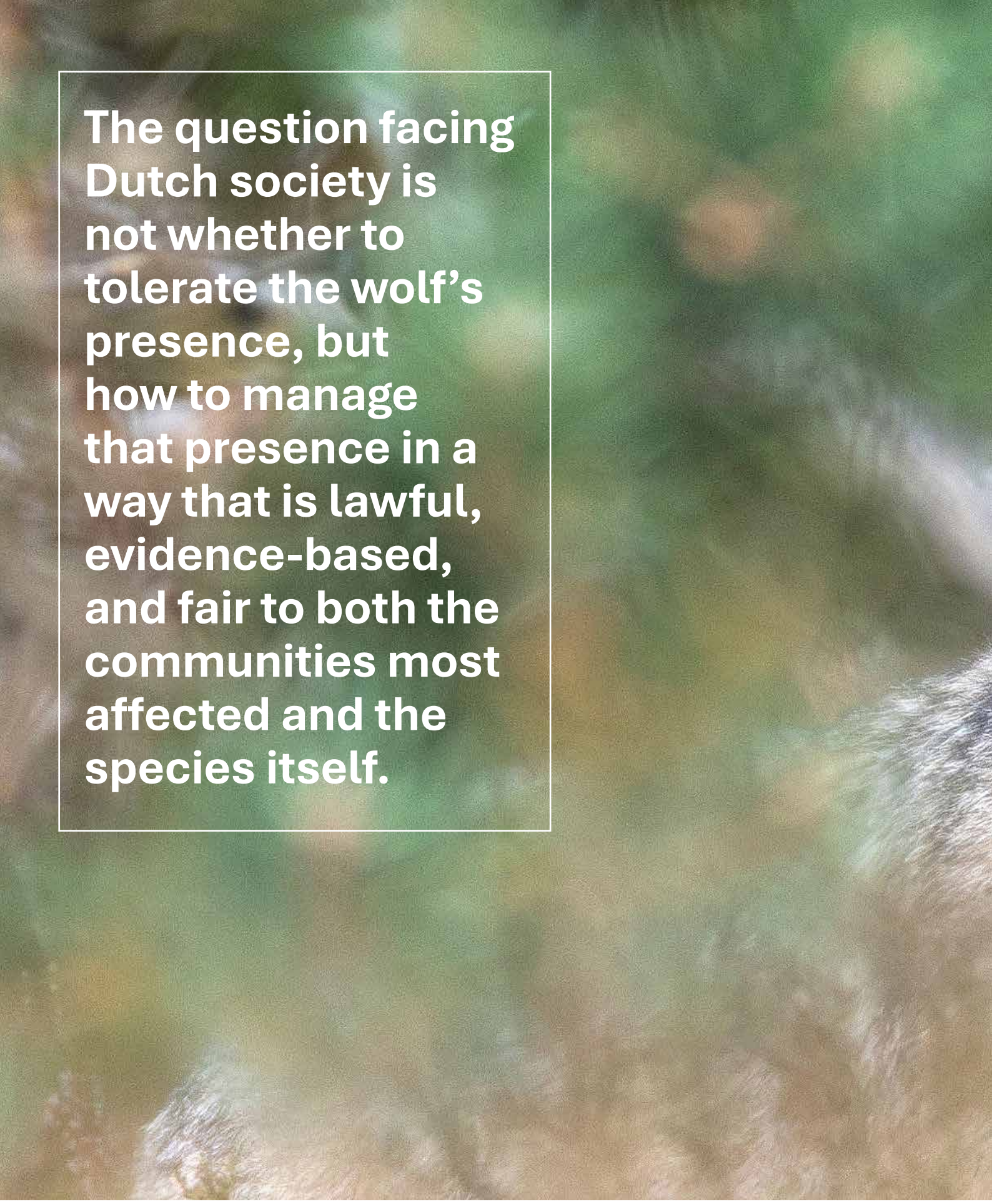
Nr.	Individual	Origin	First confirmed	Last confirmed	Status
33	GW2090f	Barnstorf (DE)	24/04/2021	28/09/2025	Resident
34	GW2089m	Schermbeck (DE)	25/04/2021	25/04/2021	Unknown
35	GW2362m	Unknown	10/05/2021	28/05/2021	Traffic casualty
36	GW2363f	Barnstorf (DE)	13/05/2021	23/08/2025	Resident
37	GW2398m	Noord - Veluwe	18/09/2021	27/03/2024	Left the Netherlands
38	GW2397m	Eschede (DE)	22/09/2021	29/09/2025	Resident
39	GW2402m	Alpine population (FR)	11/11/2021	09/01/2022	Left the Netherlands
40	GW1954m	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	18/12/2021	18/03/2021	Disappeared
41	GW2419m	Unknown	18/12/2021	17/01/2022	Unknown
42	GW2563m	Noord - Veluwe	30/12/2021	08/05/2025	Resident
43	GW2432m	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	17/01/2022	21/01/2022	Traffic casualty
44	GW2433m	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	16/02/2022	16/02/2022	Traffic casualty
45	GW1924m	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	27/02/2022	01/03/2022	Left the Netherlands
46	GW3154m	Noord - Veluwe	28/02/2022	28/02/2022	Found dead
47	GW2664m	Barnstorf (DE)	01/03/2022	06/10/2025	Found dead
48	GW2667m	Noord - Veluwe	15/03/2022	27/12/2022	Left the Netherlands
49	GW2668f	Unknown	20/03/2022	01/12/2025	Resident
50	GW2669f	Noord - Veluwe	31/03/2022	05/06/2022	Traffic casualty
51	GW2603m	Nordhorn (DE)	02/04/2022	02/04/2022	Traffic casualty
52	GW2665m	Barnstorf (DE)	05/04/2022	16/04/2022	Left the Netherlands
53	GW2379m	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	09/04/2022	09/04/2022	Traffic casualty
54	GW2666f	Noord - Veluwe	09/04/2022	07/10/2025	Resident
55	GW2541m	Unknown	15/04/2022	02/09/2022	Left the Netherlands
56	GW2670f	Unknown	20/04/2022	31/05/2022	Disappeared
57	GW2540f	Göhrde (DE)	25/04/2022	06/10/2025	Resident
58	GW2905m	Noord - Veluwe	03/05/2022	11/01/2023	Traffic casualty
59	GW2864m	Gastov (DE)	22/06/2022	29/04/2023	Left the Netherlands
60	GW2488m	Rehburg (DE)	02/07/2022	25/10/2022	Left the Netherlands
61	GW2902f	Scheeßel (DE)	07/07/2022	17/10/2022	Disappeared
62	GW2903m	Midden - Veluwe	08/07/2022	08/07/2022	Disappeared
63	GW2904m	Unknown	13/07/2022	13/07/2022	Disappeared
64	GW3011f	Nordhorn (DE)	08/09/2022	27/08/2025	Resident
65	GW2932m	Unknown	21/09/2022	21/09/2022	Found dead
66	GW3012f	Göhrde (DE)	03/10/2022	14/08/2024	Found dead
67	GW2435m	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	14/11/2022	07/10/2025	Resident
68	GW3149m	Unknown	09/11/2022	09/11/2022	Disappeared
69	GW3151m	Drents - Friese Regio	18/11/2022	09/07/2023	Culled
70	GW3158m	Midden - Veluwe	29/11/2022	28/08/2023	Traffic casualty
71	GW3150m	Unknown	30/11/2022	30/11/2022	Disappeared
72	GW3156m	Noord - Veluwe	25/12/2022	12/02/2023	Disappeared
73	GW3157m	Midden - Veluwe	12/12/2022	13/01/2023	Left the Netherlands
74	GW2807m	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	11/01/2023	27/03/2023	Left the Netherlands
75	GW3155m	Noord - Veluwe	15/01/2023	22/02/2024	Left the Netherlands

Nr.	Individual	Origin	First confirmed	Last confirmed	Status
76	GW3153f	Drents - Friese Regio	16/01/2023	16/01/2023	Traffic casualty
77	GW3152m	Drents - Friese Regio	20/01/2023	28/01/2024	Left the Netherlands
78	GW3236f	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	11/02/2023	03/03/2023	Traffic casualty
79	GW3239f	Noord - Veluwe	12/02/2023	22/06/2023	Disappeared
80	GW3241f	Unknown	21/02/2023	21/02/2023	Disappeared
81	GW2936f	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	26/02/2023	01/03/2023	Traffic casualty
82	GW3065f	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	05/03/2023	05/03/2023	Traffic casualty
83	GW3238m	Noord - Veluwe	28/02/2023	10/03/2025	Resident
84	GW3242f	Unknown	15/03/2023	15/03/2023	Disappeared
85	GW3237m	Noord - Veluwe	02/04/2023	03/12/2025	Culled
86	GW3243f	Unknown	01/04/2023	07/12/2023	Traffic casualty
87	GW3250m	Unknown	11/04/2023	05/02/2025	Resident
88	GW2937m	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	14/04/2023	14/04/2023	Traffic casualty
89	GW2935m	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	23/04/2023	23/04/2023	Disappeared
90	GW3240m	Unknown	25/04/2023	25/04/2023	Disappeared
91	GW3618m	Unknown	30/05/2023	30/05/2023	Disappeared
92	GW3425m	Flechtinger Höhenzug (DE)	29/06/2023	24/08/2024	Traffic casualty
93	GW3541m	Meppen (DE)	30/08/2023	20/02/2025	Disperser
94	GW3873f	Noord - Veluwe	07/09/2023	07/09/2023	Found dead
95	GW3695m	Zuidwest - Veluwe	27/09/2023	05/09/2024	Traffic casualty
96	GW3691f	Zuidwest - Veluwe	06/10/2023	28/11/2024	Left the Netherlands
97	GW3692m	Zuidwest - Veluwe	06/10/2023	04/10/2025	Disperser
98	GW3693f	Noordwest - Veluwe	06/10/2023	04/12/2023	Found dead
99	GW3689m	Drents - Friese Regio	10/10/2023	23/08/2025	Disperser
100	GW3690m	Drents - Friese Regio	10/10/2023	29/04/2024	Found dead
101	GW3694f	Noord - Veluwe	14/10/2023	29/08/2025	Disperser
102	GW3647f	Steinhorst (DE)	15/10/2023	25/10/2023	Traffic casualty
103	GW3810f	Unknown	23/10/2023	23/10/2023	Disappeared
104	GW3878m	Noord - Veluwe	02/11/2023	26/01/2025	In parental territory
105	GW3813m	Drents - Friese Regio	03/11/2023	12/04/2024	Found dead
106	GW3812m	Drents - Friese Regio	04/11/2023	05/04/2024	Disappeared
107	GW3815f	Drents - Friese Regio	04/11/2023	06/06/2025	Resident
108	GW3879f	Noord - Veluwe	05/11/2023	05/11/2023	Disappeared
109	GW3645m	Tiefensee-Löbnitz (DE)	07/11/2023	16/12/2023	Unknown
110	GW3816f	Noord - Veluwe	10/11/2023	19/04/2025	Resident
111	GW3814f	Noord - Veluwe	16/11/2023	13/12/2023	Traffic casualty
112	GW3880m	Unknown	19/11/2023	19/11/2023	Disappeared
113	GW3875m	Noord - Veluwe	24/11/2023	24/11/2023	Found dead
114	GW3877m	Midden - Drenthe	27/11/2023	27/11/2023	Disappeared
115	GW3883f	Zuidwest - Veluwe	06/12/2023	06/12/2023	Traffic casualty
116	GW3882m	Drents - Friese Regio	09/12/2023	08/05/2024	Left the Netherlands
117	GW3881m	Midden - Drenthe	13/12/2023	08/04/2024	Disappeared
118	GW3874m	Midden - Drenthe	13/12/2023	16/06/2025	Disperser

Nr.	Individual	Origin	First confirmed	Last confirmed	Status
119	GW3876f	Zuidwest - Veluwe	13/12/2023	10/09/2025	Resident
120	GW3884m	Noordwest - Veluwe	18/12/2023	18/12/2023	Traffic casualty
121	GW4009m	Drents - Friese Regio	14/12/2023	22/05/2025	Traffic casualty
122	GW4010f	Drents - Friese Regio	20/12/2023	20/12/2023	Disappeared
123	GW4003m	Noordwest - Veluwe	12/01/2024	06/10/2025	Resident
124	GW4006m	Noordwest - Veluwe	12/01/2024	12/01/2024	Disappeared
125	GW4008m	Noord - Veluwe	12/01/2024	23/12/2024	Traffic casualty
126	GW4005m	Zuidwest - Veluwe	24/01/2024	20/09/2024	Found dead
127	GW4075f	Midden - Drenthe	19/01/2024	03/05/2024	Traffic casualty
128	GW4076f	Midden - Veluwe	29/01/2024	25/10/2025	Resident
129	GW4077f	Deutsche Kaarzer Holz (DE)	06/02/2024	25/10/2025	Found dead
130	GW4007f	Noord - Veluwe	10/02/2024	03/01/2025	Disappeared
131	GW4244f	Zuidwest - Veluwe	23/02/2024	23/02/2024	Traffic casualty
132	GW3824m	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	15/03/2024	03/04/2024	Left the Netherlands
133	GW4245m	Unknown	21/03/2024	21/03/2024	Traffic casualty
134	GW4240m	Unknown	01/04/2024	12/07/2025	Resident
135	GW4246f	Unknown	05/04/2024	05/04/2024	Traffic casualty
136	GW3449f	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	15/04/2024	31/07/2025	Resident
137	GW4242m	Unknown	19/04/2024	10/09/2025	Resident
138	GW4243f	Unknown	15/05/2024	23/09/2025	Traffic casualty
139	GW4411m	Noord - Veluwe	23/05/2024	23/05/2024	Found dead
140	GW3826m	Hechtel-Eksel (BE)	11/06/2024	11/06/2024	Traffic casualty
141	GW4414	Noord - Veluwe	14/06/2024	14/06/2024	Disperser
142	GW4097f	Hohes Venn (BE)	23/06/2024	20/09/2024	Disappeared
143	GW4415m	Utrechtse Heuvelrug	17/07/2024	17/11/2024	Disappeared
144	GW4412m	Utrechtse Heuvelrug	09/08/2024	25/03/2025	Traffic casualty
145	GW4413m	Utrechtse Heuvelrug	09/08/2024	17/02/2025	In parental territory
146	GW4507f	Zuidoost - Veluwe	16/08/2024	30/03/2025	In parental territory
147	GW4506f	Midden - Drenthe	26/08/2024	07/04/2025	In parental territory
148	GW4501m	Unknown	12/09/2024	19/10/2025	Disperser
149	GW4505f	Noordwest - Veluwe	12/09/2024	14/02/2025	In parental territory
150	GW4502m	Midden - Drenthe	17/09/2024	16/09/2025	In parental territory
151	GW4508m	Zuidwest - Veluwe	26/09/2024	26/09/2024	Traffic casualty
152	GW4509f	Zuidwest - Veluwe	26/09/2024	26/09/2024	Traffic casualty
153	GW4510f	Zuidwest - Veluwe	26/09/2024	26/09/2024	Traffic casualty
154	GW3833m	Leppinger Heide (DE)	08/10/2024	19/11/2024	Unknown
155	GW4401f	Friedeburg (DE)	10/10/2024	27/12/2024	Traffic casualty
156	GW4504f	Utrechtse Heuvelrug	14/10/2024	09/02/2025	In parental territory
157	GW4503m	Midden - Drenthe	16/10/2024	26/09/2025	In parental territory
158	GW4477m	Utrechtse Heuvelrug	17/10/2024	09/11/2024	Traffic casualty
159	GW4613m	Noord - Veluwe	29/10/2024	29/10/2024	Traffic casualty
160	GW4607m	Unknown	31/10/2024	26/05/2025	Disperser
161	GW4614f	Zuidwest - Veluwe	03/11/2024	03/11/2024	Traffic casualty

Nr.	Individual	Origin	First confirmed	Last confirmed	Status
162	GW4603f	Noordwest - Veluwe	09/11/2024	09/11/2024	Disappeared
163	GW4604f	Noordwest - Veluwe	09/11/2024	09/11/2024	Disappeared
164	GW4611m	Bucknitzer Heide (DE)	10/11/2024	10/11/2024	Traffic casualty
165	GW4605m	Zuidwest - Veluwe	15/11/2024	15/11/2024	Disappeared
166	GW4610m	Midden - Veluwe	24/11/2024	24/11/2024	Traffic casualty
167	GW3661m	Drewensee (DE)	25/11/2024	25/11/2024	Traffic casualty
168	GW4609f	Zuidwest - Veluwe	25/11/2024	25/11/2024	Found dead
169	GW4606m	Drents - Friese Regio	28/11/2024	04/03/2025	Left the Netherlands
170	GW4612m	Drents - Friese Regio	30/11/2024	30/11/2024	Traffic casualty
171	GW4602m	Schermbeck (DE)	02/12/2024	27/05/2025	Disperser
172	GW4608f	Zuidwest - Veluwe	05/12/2024	05/12/2024	Traffic casualty
173	GW4700m	Midden - Veluwe	14/10/2024	14/10/2024	Disappeared
174	GW4683f	Noordoost - Veluwe	13/11/2024	19/10/2025	In parental territory
175	GW4699f	Midden - Veluwe	13/11/2024	15/12/2024	Disappeared
176	GW4698f	Midden - Veluwe	15/11/2024	11/08/2025	In parental territory
177	GW4681m	Noordoost - Veluwe	03/12/2024	30/08/2025	In parental territory
178	GW4688m	Gelderse Vallei Noord	14/12/2024	03/10/2025	In parental territory
179	GW4682m	Noordoost - Veluwe	31/12/2024	05/09/2025	In parental territory
180	GW4318m	Wedemark (DE)	02/01/2025	01/07/2025	Traffic casualty
181	GW4689m	Gelderse Vallei Noord	03/01/2025	22/04/2025	Traffic casualty
182	GW4703f	Noord - Veluwe	05/01/2025	05/01/2025	Traffic casualty
183	GW4680f	Drents - Friese Regio	10/01/2025	10/04/2025	In parental territory
184	GW4697f	Midden - Drenthe	14/01/2025	21/09/2025	In parental territory
185	GW4693m	Zuidwest - Veluwe	17/01/2025	18/09/2025	In parental territory
186	GW4684f	Unknown	18/01/2025	18/01/2025	Disperser
187	GW4696f	Noord - Veluwe	20/01/2025	20/01/2025	Disperser
188	GW4687m	Drents - Friese Regio	24/01/2025	27/02/2025	In parental territory
189	GW2592m	Dörpen (DE)	25/01/2025	23/03/2025	Disperser
190	GW4694f	Midden - Veluwe	28/01/2025	30/03/2025	Resident
191	GW4701f	Midden - Veluwe	31/01/2025	10/04/2025	In parental territory
192	GW4702f	Noordwest - Veluwe	31/01/2025	31/01/2025	In parental territory
193	GW4692m	Drents - Friese Regio	31/01/2025	11/04/2025	Disperser
194	GW4685m	Noordoost - Veluwe	05/02/2025	05/02/2025	In parental territory
195	GW4883f	Gelderse Vallei Noord	06/02/2025	28/03/2025	In parental territory
196	GW4884m	Gelderse Vallei Noord	06/02/2025	26/07/2025	In parental territory
197	GW4889m	Drents - Friese Regio	08/02/2025	07/10/2025	In parental territory
198	GW4887m	Unknown	11/02/2025	11/02/2025	Left the Netherlands
199	GW4888f	Midden - Veluwe	12/02/2025	22/04/2025	In parental territory
200	GW4704m	Noordoost - Veluwe	13/02/2025	13/02/2025	Traffic casualty
201	GW4691f	Noord - Veluwe	15/02/2025	15/02/2025	In parental territory
202	GW4890m	Drents - Friese Regio	16/02/2025	24/09/2025	In parental territory
203	GW4690m	Zuidwest - Veluwe	23/02/2025	26/06/2025	Left the Netherlands
204	GW4686f	Unknown	19/02/2025	25/02/2025	Disperser

Nr.	Individual	Origin	First confirmed	Last confirmed	Status
205	GW4893f	Drents - Friese Regio	25/02/2025	02/03/2025	In parental territory
206	GW4695f	Noordwest - Veluwe	01/03/2025	12/09/2025	In parental territory
207	GW4894f	Unknown	04/03/2025	26/06/2025	Disperser
208	GW5086m	Unknown	08/03/2025	08/03/2025	Disperser
209	GW4891f	Noordoost - Veluwe	13/03/2025	13/03/2025	Traffic casualty
210	GW4892m	Unknown	14/03/2025	14/03/2025	Traffic casualty
211	GW5078f	Zuidwest - Veluwe	28/03/2025	25/05/2025	Traffic casualty
212	GW4885f	Zuidoost - Veluwe	30/03/2025	03/05/2025	In parental territory
213	GW4886f	Zuidwest - Veluwe	01/04/2025	01/04/2025	Disperser
214	GW3970m	Goitzsche Wildnis (DE)	09/04/2025	16/04/2025	Disperser
215	GW4418m	Langenlehsten-Leisterföhrde (DE)	10/04/2025	10/04/2025	Traffic casualty
216	GW5085m	Unknown	14/04/2025	24/04/2025	Disperser
217	GW4895f	Unknown	24/04/2025	27/04/2025	Disperser
218	GW5083m	Unknown	07/05/2025	03/11/2025	Disperser
219	GW5082m	Noordoost - Veluwe	08/05/2025	05/06/2025	In parental territory
220	GW5256m	Noordoost - Veluwe	01/10/2025	21/10/2025	Traffic casualty
221	GW5258m	Drents - Friese Regio	01/12/2025	11/12/2025	Traffic casualty
222	GW5087m	Unknown	26/06/2025	17/07/2025	Disperser
223	GW4655m	NP de Hoge Veluwe	01/09/2022	13/04/2025	Resident
224	GW5079f	Gelderse Vallei	16/08/2025	16/08/2025	In parental territory
225	GW5081m	Gelderse Vallei	16/08/2025	16/08/2025	In parental territory
226	GW5089f	Noordwest-Veluwe	18/09/2025	18/09/2025	Found dead
227	GW5090f	Unknown	24/09/2025	24/09/2025	Traffic casualty
228	GW5192m	Rüdesheim pack (DE)	25/06/2025	01/07/2025	Disperser
229	GW5248m	Midden - Drenthe	17/09/2025	29/10/2025	In parental territory
230	GW5249m	Unknown	02/06/2025	02/06/2025	Disperser
231	GW5250m	Middenveld	21/10/2025	26/10/2025	In parental territory
232	GW5251f	Middenveld	26/10/2025	26/10/2025	In parental territory
233	GW5252f	Middenveld	26/10/2025	26/10/2025	In parental territory
234	GW5253m	Noordwest-Veluwe	26/09/2025	26/11/2025	In parental territory
235	GW5255m	Unknown	26/09/2025	29/10/2025	Disperser
236	GW5415f	Unknown	26/12/2025	26/12/2025	Unknown
237	GW5417m	Noordoost-Veluwe	12/11/2025	12/11/2025	In parental territory
238	GW5418m	Utrechtse Heuvelrug	28/11/2025	28/11/2025	In parental territory
239	GW5419m	Noordwest-Veluwe	06/11/2025	06/11/2025	In parental territory
240	GW5421m	Midden-Veluwe	09/12/2025	09/12/2025	In parental territory
241	GW5423f	Midden - Drenthe	25/11/2025	26/11/2025	In parental territory
242	GW5424m	Zuidwest- Veluwe	12/11/2025	13/12/2025	In parental territory
243	GW5425m	Zuidwest- Veluwe	30/12/2025	30/12/2025	In parental territory
244	GW5426m	Zuidwest- Veluwe	12/11/2025	14/11/2025	Traffic casualty
245	GW5427f	Zuidwest- Veluwe	05/11/2025	05/11/2025	In parental territory
246	GW5428m	Gelderse Vallei Noord	22/10/2025	10/11/2025	In parental territory
247	GW5432m	Gelderse Vallei Noord	01/12/2025	01/12/2025	Traffic casualty
248	GW5433f	Gelderse Vallei	29/11/2025	05/12/2025	In parental territory
249	GW5088m	Göhrde (DE)	22/07/2025	22/07/2025	Traffic casualty
250	GW5091f	Noordwest-Veluwe	05/10/2025	05/10/2025	Traffic casualty
251	GW5429m	Unknown	21/11/2025	21/11/2025	Found dead
252	GW5430f	Drents-Friese regio	25/11/2025	25/11/2025	Traffic casualty
253	GW5431m	Unknown	30/11/2025	30/11/2025	Found dead
254	GW5416f	Zuid-Drenthe regio	10/12/2025	10/12/2025	Found dead
255	GW5080m	Noordoost-Veluwe	2025	2025	In parental territory
256	GW5084m	Unknown	Aug. 2025	2025	Disperser
257	GW5254f	Noordoost-Veluwe	2025	2025	In parental territory
258	GW5420m	Utrechtse Heuvelrug	2025	2025	In parental territory
259	GW5422m	Midden-Veluwe	2025	2025	In parental territory



The question facing Dutch society is not whether to tolerate the wolf's presence, but how to manage that presence in a way that is lawful, evidence-based, and fair to both the communities most affected and the species itself.

ECOJUST

Humane World for Animals