Packs of wolf-dog hybrids threaten Europe's wolves

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"Swarms" of wolf-dog crossbreeds could drive Europe's wolves out of existence, according to the lead author of new research. Such hybridisation—driven by human activities that destroy habitats and mean wolves encounter more and more free-roaming dogs—threatens the "genetic identity" of wolves.

The study compares the views of more than 40 scientists and warns that a lack of engagement and agreement could hamper efforts to tackle wolf-dog hybridisation. The findings suggest most scientists agree on the nature of the problem, but are divided on how to deal with it.

"We need to address this issue before wolf-dog hybrids backcross with wolves to the extent that wolf populations will be lost to hybrid swarms, and the conservation of wild populations will become unfeasible," said lead author Valerio Donfrancesco, of the Centre for Ecology and Conservation on the University of Exeter's Penryn Campus in Cornwall.

"There are margins to develop further consensus among scientists if further research addresses topical issues such as the effectiveness and the feasibility of control measures and their social acceptability.

"Scientists should not avoid the problem just because its management appears overly complex."

Co-author Dr. Nibedita Mukherjee, from the
University of Exeter, added: "We hope that by highlighting areas of disagreement and why they occur, we will be able to build a more unified scientific opinion, and aid an effective management of this urgent issue."

An estimated 17,000 wolves live in Europe, in populations of varying sizes in countries as far apart as Spain, Greece and Finland.


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