

# Wolves Between the Lines of Nature & Culture

What Wolves, Shepherds, Sheep, and Dogs May Tell Us About Co-Existence  
in the Damaged Landscape of the (South-West) Veluwe





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**Master's Thesis**

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## Acknowledgment

Life on this planet is something that (pre)occupies me. With every new climate change report, I sometimes find myself losing hope. Concerned, and perhaps even a little frustrated, I went to the South-West Veluwe, where tensions converge surrounding the return of wolves to the Netherlands. Through my own experiences and those of others, I learned, over a period of three months (February- April 2022), that these concerns are real. However, despite that the ecosystem of the Veluwe has been severely damaged by humans' actions, it did not all turn out to be doom and gloom. I have been so fortunate to encounter several humans and other-than-humans on my path who, day in and day out, work to make the area liveable again. I will be forever grateful to you for opening my imagination. You are my light.

A special thanks goes out to my Aunt Mary. Thank you for opening both your home and your heart to me. You made it possible for me to learn not only about the area, but also about myself. Thank you for the many stories you told me about my grandfather.

Henry, you have taught me so much. I am grateful for the insights you were willing to share with me during our walks in the forest, as well as for drawing my attention to little birds from time to time so we could admire them together. You understand the arts of noticing.

I would also like to thank Simon, the dogs, and the sheep for receiving me in their sheepfold and on the heath. Simon, from my first day to my last, I have enjoyed working with you. Thank you for telling me I was welcome back every time I left.

Furthermore, I wish to express my gratitude to all the other participants, such as farmers, ecologists, villagers, who were prepared to make time for me and allowed me to give meaning to this thesis drawing on their knowledge, life experience and passion.

Each time I came up with a list of endless questions, my supervisor Gijs was always willing to answer them. Thank you for all your attention and involvement in this project. I look back with great pleasure on the inspiring discussions we had, in which you were able to challenge me, sharpen my focus, but at the same time gave me confidence that things would turn out all right.

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Last but not least, I want to bring attention to all the other-than-human participants in my research project, including wolves. I hope I am doing you justice to how much you all matter.



# Table of Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENT</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>PROLOGUE</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>11</b>
THE FIELD – LOCATION AND PARTICIPANTS .....	14
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	16
ETHICS AND POSITIONALITY .....	18
OUTLINE.....	19
<b>1. SITUATING THE WOLF’S RETURN IN THE (SOUTH-WEST) VELUWE</b> .....	<b>23</b>
A HISTORY OF MANIPULABILITY IN THE (SOUTH-WEST) VELUWE .....	23
TODAY’S (SOUTH-WEST) VELUWE .....	25
IMAGINING THE WOLF IN A DAMAGED LANDSCAPE .....	28
WOLVES MAKING THEIR WAY THROUGH A DAMAGED (SOUTH-WEST) VELUWE - CONCLUDING REMARKS .....	31
<b>2. INDUSTRIALISATION OF AGRICULTURE - A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING</b> .....	<b>34</b>
THE PLANTATIONOCENE’S GRIP ON THE (SOUTH-WEST) VELUWE .....	34
FARMERS STUCK IN SCALABLE ECONOMIES .....	37
WOLVES’ STATE OF PROTECTION .....	39
INTERROGATING POWER RELATIONS IN THE (SOUTH-WEST) VELUWE – CONCLUDING REMARKS .....	42
<b>3. WOLVES AND FENCES</b> .....	<b>45</b>
BECOMING-WITH WOLVES.....	45
FENCED-OFF NATURE .....	48
BREAKING OUT OF THE PLANTATIONOCENE – CONCLUDING REMARKS .....	52
<b>4. COLLABORATIVE WORK IN SHEPHERDING</b> .....	<b>55</b>
DECONSTRUCTING SCALABILITY THROUGH SHEPHERDING .....	56
EXPLORING COLLABORATION IN SHEPHERDS’ IMAGINARIES.....	59
DECONSTRUCTING BINARIES THROUGH DOMESTICATION-AS-REWILDING .....	61
REBUILDING A MULTISPECIES LANDSCAPE – CONCLUDING REMARKS .....	63
<b>CONCLUSION - TOWARDS CO-EXISTENCE BEYOND CAPITALISM</b> .....	<b>66</b>
FINAL NOTES .....	67
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>APPENDIX</b> .....	<b>81</b>



Image 1. & 2. Wolf attack  
Photographer: Shepherd Nico



## Prologue

Two wolves approach at breakneck speed. In a straight line. The herd is loosely clustered against the heathlands. Relaxed, grazing quietly. A peaceful scene. The sheep lingering on the outer edge of the flock never saw them coming. Yet a few seconds later, she is flanked by two wolves, wordlessly cooperating with each other. One wolf has its head low, the other pushes the sheep to rise, to stretch, to extend, to expose her throat. Then I see a sheep and wolf together, heads together, as in a passionate dance. Her neck backwards as a shearer should do. Both heads stick up as the wolf, like a Latino lover, bends around the fear-stricken sheep from behind and sets his teeth in the white wool of her throat. Almost like Dracula himself. Next to the much larger wolf, the ewe looks fine and delicate, like a ballet dancer. A swan. A dying swan. And the wolf looks like a wolf. A forbidden love who betrayed her. In two-three seconds it's over.

And I watch everything happen from the stands, with the heathlands as the arena. I had a seat in the front row, and I was the only spectator. It was exciting. Of course. Anything with wolves is exciting. It was scary because I didn't know what was going to happen, but what actually ensued was not that scary. It wasn't a hunting party by a pack of wolves. They were not surrounding us to select their preys. It was not the beginning of a slaughter.

It was an attack. An attack on one sheep, carried out with military precision. If I had not been standing in the perfect spot and looking just in the right direction, I might not have even noticed. If it had happened in the middle of the tall purple moor-grass - a grass measuring one and a half meter in some places - I would not have understood a thing. I was lucky.

Questions from people suggest that everyone makes up their own story in their heads. Which is understandable, because it appeals to the imagination. But that imagination makes everything so much more horrific than what I experienced in reality. So, then I say, well well, it wasn't that bad. Because after that first bite, nothing much actually happened. Nothing spectacular, I mean. I didn't feel personally threatened at any point, didn't have to run for my life or fight off the wolf with my shepherd's crook. And yet it was exciting enough as it was, and the adrenaline was racing through my body. As a result, I could only manage to capture some lousy pictures. I turned out to be a shepherd, and not a photographer, after all.

[Shepherd Nico, Facebook post, 15 October 2021]

## Introduction

For most Dutch people, the question *what would I do if I encountered a wolf?* may prove difficult to answer. For one and a half centuries, this question was mostly speculative and remained in the realm of the imagination. Hundred-fifty years ago, the wolf disappeared from the Netherlands due to agricultural and hunting interests (Jansman 2021, 38). Yet recently, stories like Shepherd Nico's in the prologue, are no longer rare. When a wolf, alive, was spotted on Dutch land again for the first time in 2015, an extensive societal debate arose (Drenthen 2015). Ever since, wolves have increased in numbers, and their encounters with humans and other-than-humans in the Dutch landscape followed suit (Poelert 2022). According to BIJ12 (2022), a national organisation monitoring wolves, the Veluwe area plays a key role in providing the species with a habitat, for that is where most youngsters seek their partners and parents raise their children. The Veluwe - a region in the central Dutch province of Gelderland - consists of protected nature, agriculture, and populated areas (Boonman-Berson, Driessen, and Turnhout 2019).

When wolves move through the Veluwe forests, heathlands, villages, or meadows, they cross all kinds of human-made boundaries between what is considered nature and culture, challenging or even deconstructing them (Drenthen, 2021). In doing so, they may encounter numerous 'others' that share a particular appreciation for the area: including an array of plants, fungi, insects, birds, reptiles, and mammals, such as deer, wild boar, sheep, farmers, tourists, foresters, cows, dogs, shepherds, and me. For the purpose of this thesis, I wandered through the South-West Veluwe to explore multispecies dynamics of wolf encounters. The region was established as territory for a young pair of wolves. However, both died by human doing, short after their arrival in the area. While one could not escape the fate of a car accident, the other was fatally shot by a bullet (NOS 2021).

These incidents interrogate how the wolf's position in the Veluwe is imagined. The current Dutch debate is polarised, in that for some, the arrival of wolves is the pinnacle of years of nature policy, considered a prerequisite for a sustainable ecosystem (Jansman et al. 2021), and for others, wolves represent nothing but great danger to their livelihoods (Van der Linde 2019). Martin Drenthen (2021, 426), an environmental philosopher at Radboud University, even argues that the return of the European Grey Wolf (*Canis lupus*) to Western Europe is certainly the most contentious "example of the Anthropocene's return of the wild."

To explore the underlying mechanisms of contested imaginaries of wolves and their unfolding in everyday life among human and other-than-human inhabitants of the South-West

Veluwe, I conducted a multispecies ethnography. In this region of the Veluwe, tensions around the presence of wolves are building for several years, in part because of its clear divisions between agricultural and natural areas (Boonman-Berson, Driessen, and Turnhout 2019; Jansman et al. 2021). Wolves, often assigned to the domain of wilderness by humans (Pluskowski 2006, 11), increasingly attack sheep, who are imagined to belong within (agri)cultural areas (Drenthen 2021). This directly puts the existence of industrial sheep farming in jeopardy (NowolvesBenelux n.d.a).

Charles Taylor's (2002) notion of social imaginaries is useful in unpacking such tensions, as it opens opportunities to examine the ways in which imaginaries fundamentally shape how members of a group perceive and perform their social worlds. Taylor (2002, 106) describes social imaginaries as "the ways in which people imagine their social existence, [...] the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations." Whereas Taylor's definition refers only to the human domain, or "society", in which these social imaginaries are constructed (Adams et al. 2015, 17), in this thesis, I extend this notion to a multispecies domain reaching further than only humans. More specifically, I seek to understand the broader socio-environmental dynamics that form and deconstruct imaginaries.

Accordingly, this requires a consideration of the larger assemblage within which wolves, humans and many other species are situated. The concept of assemblage was first coined by the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in a 1980 interview (Nail 2017). Later, anthropologists like Latour (2005, 217) build on this to define "what is made to act by a large star-shaped web of mediators flowing in and out of it. It is made to exist by its many ties: attachments are first, actors are second" (Latour 2005, 217). An assemblage is therefore the coming together of heterogeneous - human and other-than-human - elements in relationships with one another (Tsing 2015, 22-23). Applying this theory challenges modes of binary thinking shaped by nature-culture dichotomies. In fact, the concept builds on the principle that our existence depends on others and that we are, therefore, inextricably entwined with them. I approach the Veluwe assemblage as the heterogeneous networked patterns and processes shaping life in the South-West Veluwe, within which I consider all situated and dynamic actors to be "absolutely central to worlding" (Haraway 2016, 60), that is: central to forming life. I practice a relational, non-hegemonic understanding of the area, in which humans and other-than-humans are mutually constituted in - and through - relationships. After all, in the current context of ecological degradation and related biodiversity loss, people are urged to reconsider

their behavioural impact and to think and act beyond human exceptionalism (Chakrabarty 2021).

Through capitalist dynamics and the consequential upscaling of agriculture, the (South-West) Veluwe has become an environmentally damaged landscape (Gies, Kros, and Voogd 2021), giving rise to many interspecies power relationships and nature-culture binaries (Tsing 2015, 63). The concept of the Plantationocene, an alternative term for the widely used Anthropocene - where humans and other animals are turned into resources and biodiversity-rich landscapes into large monotonous plantations (Tsing 2017, 51) - provides a lens through which to analyse the area. It helps understand why certain areas in the Veluwe are surrounded by boundaries, such as fences, to protect capitalist assets (Drenthen 2015; 2021). Wolves themselves appear to take little notice of these boundaries and continuously cross them, consequently unleashing a range of both human and other-than-human anticipatory dynamics in the Veluwe assemblage (Jansman 2021, 39-40; Stephan and Flaherty 2019).

Therefore, this multispecies ethnography regards the wolf as the catalyst to a collection of environmental, social, political, and economic changes within the Veluwe, and sheds light on the ensuing network of interactions between its stakeholders. Following wolves in the assemblage of the South-West Veluwe, this thesis answers the research question:

How does the return of the wolf to the Netherlands (re)construct and challenge multispecies assemblages and socio-environmental imaginaries among human stakeholders in the South-West Veluwe?

In order to answer this main question, I explore how features of capitalism permeate in social imaginaries and this imagined nature as a source of income, now threatened by the return of the wolf. Accordingly, this thesis depicts social imaginaries of nature and their roots in nature-culture binaries, informing the wolf debate in the South-West Veluwe. I consider boundaries, such as fences, as a materialised human imaginary of other species' belonging (Drenthen 2021). By bringing together ethnographic fieldwork and anthropological concepts, I argue that wolves' ability to cross these boundaries challenges binary thinking and leads us to reflect on humans' position in a multispecies world.

Furthermore, I consider how different anticipatory dynamics emerge as wolves make their way through the damaged landscape (Stephan and Flaherty 2019). Wolves' disruptive presence leads to anticipatory dynamics from human (e.g., sheep farmers) and other-than-human actors (e.g., deer) (Stephan and Flaherty 2019, 4). This has important implications for

the assemblage and thus for the South-West Veluwe area as a whole. Furthermore, anthropological research on wolf debates merely centre around the polarisation of human groups (see for example Fenske and Tschofen 2020; Van Wechem 2018). Through the example of shepherding, this thesis aims to contribute to anthropological work by looking further into anticipatory dynamics and co-existence *across* species.

Drawing on the story of shepherds, sheep, but also dogs – the species joining forces with wolves in restoring the ecological damaged area – this thesis proposes how wolves can lead us to potentials of co-existence within environmental disturbances through Anna Tsing’s (2018) concept of domestication-as-rewilding. Domestication-as-rewilding is presented as a tool to work across species boundaries while creating a site for multiple species to thrive. As such, shepherding contests the very foundation of binary thinking. By sharing their work, wolves, shepherds, sheep, and dogs can spark the kind of curiosity that seems to me to be a precondition for co-existing within environmental disruptions.

### The field – location and participants

This research focuses on the region of the Veluwe, the largest nature reserve in the Netherlands. Covering an area of 91,200 hectares, it is characterised by forests, heathlands, shifting sands, agriculture, and a few villages. The region is divided into segments, all managed by different owners, making the area far from unified. While some sections are connected, others are fenced off from one another (Boonman-Berson, Driessen, and Turnhout 2019, 4).

Since 2015, over 80 per cent of approximately 2000 wolf sightings in the Netherlands (including wolf faeces and documented footprints) were in the Veluwe (BIJ12 2022). My research took place in the South-West Veluwe, a region spanning from Lunteren to Otterlo, and Wageningen, including the Hoge Veluwe National Park, as well as other nature reserves, agricultural sites, villages, and towns (see appendix 1). My activities mostly centred around the municipality of Ede. However, the later phases of my research brought me to other parts of the Veluwe where shepherding is practiced, mainly in the areas surrounding the Hoge Veluwe National Park. Here, the absence of clear boundaries in the ethnographic site should not, according to Raymond Madden (2017, 52), detract from the ethnographic quality of the research, as “the questions which impel the ethnographer, overarch geographic considerations and tie diffuse, loose, separate, mobile or distant places together into a single ethnographic field or enquiry.” Besides, as wolves themselves constantly move across lines of human-

marked areas, it seemed relevant to be flexible in my own attempts to set boundaries. For this reason, I use the words Veluwe and South-West Veluwe interchangeably throughout this thesis.

Moreover, I also defined the South-West Veluwe as my main research field because it was the territory of a recently deceased pair of wolves (NOS 2021): a male and pregnant female. When the male was shot, it raised a lot of local media coverage and public attention. The opposition between supporters and opponents of wolves deepened, and theories circulated as to who had done it and why.<sup>1</sup>

Although the Hoge Veluwe National Park is included in my research (area), I carried out my research *around* the park, not from *within* it. The fully enclosed park is the only nature reserve in the Veluwe charging an entrance fee, and clearly advocates for the protection of an exotic sheep species (the Mouflon) at the expense of wolves (De Hoge Veluwe National Park 2019). I soon became aware of surrounding people's shared condemning view on the park's policies, transcending divergent beliefs about wolves. This provided a significant incentive to focus my project on surrounding areas, without losing sight of the interconnectivity of the matter.

However, it is important to note that the Veluwe assemblage is rather extensive and has a wide range of actors. Hence, I was only able to participate in and learn about part of it. As my main participant, the wolf took the lead in determining where and on whom I focused attention, and which encounters spoke to the main question of this thesis. As such, it appeared increasingly relevant to orient the project on shepherding, for shepherds, sheep and dogs share the same grounds with wolves, which significantly enhances the likelihood of their encounters.

Other species from the Veluwe assemblage, that somehow relate to wolves and the research question, were also involved as participants. This includes deer, wild boar, sheep, dogs, birds, insects, reptiles, trees, and (other) heathland fauna. Among the human actors participating in this research: foresters, industrial (sheep) farmers, hunters, villagers, tourists, military personnel, ecologists, and nature tour guides. Human stakeholders with an activist approach towards the subject sometimes join platforms such as NowolvesBenelux (NowolvesBenelux n.d.b), or *Wolven in Nederland* (Wolves in the Netherlands). Therefore, these two organisations, holding opposing views, were included to explore their imaginaries of the wolf.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example *In het Spoor van de Wolf*, directed by Nordin Lasfar, Brigitte Borm, and Ruben Altena (2021; Argos Medialogica), [https://www.npostart.nl/argos-medialogica/02-01-2022/VPWON\\_1328832](https://www.npostart.nl/argos-medialogica/02-01-2022/VPWON_1328832)

It is also crucial to highlight that this work focuses on industrial sheep farmers, an industry driven by scale, as this reflects the current Dutch debate. However, other types of cattle farming were included, as capitalist dynamics have also driven these cattle farms to increase in scale (Buizer, Arts, and Westerink 2016). Moreover, not only sheep count as wolves' prey. Occasionally, goats, chickens, ponies, and cows do too (Thijssen 2022), to name a few. Therefore, I will refer to intensive farming in general and sometimes zoom in on sheep farming.

## Research Methodology

Throughout the course of my research, I have conducted participant observation, informal conversations, (visual) auto-ethnography, and semi-structured interviews. Triangulation, combining different methods to gain insight into the research topic from different perspectives (Fusch, Fusch, and Ness 2018), characterised my research. I undertook various research activities, such as participating in the activity of shepherding, going into the forest alongside foresters in search of wolf tracks and wild-camera's, attending wolf information meetings for animal keepers, helping out on sheep farms, meeting-up with hunters and gamekeepers, hiking with villagers and their dogs, going in conversation with ecologists, driving around nature reserves with military personnel, or simply participating in the assemblage on my own while cycling, walking, or even sitting to observe all sorts of life shaping the South-West Veluwe.

Using multispecies ethnography as a guiding method, I not only examined human social imaginaries but also attempted to trace wolves' engagements with humans, other-than-humans, and other-than-human materials such as fences (Drenthen 2015; 2021). According to Wolfe (2003), lived experiences with members of other species can open our eyes to other ways of being in the world. It highlights the interconnectedness of all living forms and allow us to re-evaluate culture-based and anthropocentric ontologies, which underlines the use of a multispecies approach in my research.

For this purpose, I needed to look at the actors, and their relationships, making up the Veluwe assemblage (Tsing 2015, 23). Exploring, for example, the encounters of wolves, deer, shepherds, vegetation, or soil from a relational perspective, reveals how in contemporary Veluwe multispecies conservation interests and human economic interests can collide. Although this multispecies approach paid attention to the diversity of the South-West Veluwe assemblage, it is humans who are featured most prominently in this thesis. First, speaking the same language, human participants were able to provide deeper insights into their imaginaries.

Second, as most of them (e.g., shepherds, foresters, nature tour guides, farmers) have been moving around the region for years already and therefore know their environment well, including other-than-humans, they were able to act as my translators and mediators in better understanding the stories of wolves and the assemblage (Bommel and Boonman-Berson 2022, 143).

For a period of eleven weeks (February-April 2022), I stayed in one of the small South-West Veluwe villages with my aunt, a physically fit woman of 75, who has run a local supermarket for 50 years and is a familiar face to many. She taught me a lot about the South-West Veluwe and was, as O'Reilly (2012, 114) would conceptualise it, my gatekeeper, especially in the beginning of the fieldwork. Biking through the area, we had many conversations about how it changed through the years, about which places might interest me, and with whom I probably wanted to speak. As such, I applied the snowball effect and made use of initial contacts to enable further contacts (O'Reilly 2012, 44).

My aim was to explore the Veluwe assemblage and seek out multiple different actors relating more or less directly to the wolf. On the first day, my aunt introduced me to two persons who became my key informants: shepherd Simon and forester Henry. I was welcomed into their sheepfold and forestry to accompany them in their daily work on many occasions. Through Simon and Henry's network, I also met many other relevant participants. In contrast to other ethnographic fieldwork, where one largely engages with the same group of actors from start to finish (O'Reilly 2012, 27), my approach affected my ability to build rapport with participants over time. However, I spent relatively more time in the field with several actors with whom a relationship of trust, understanding and sympathy was established. This includes some shepherds, sheep, dogs, an ecologist, and a military groundskeeper. All people mentioned in this study gave their informed consent and have been anonymised (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 215). Two ecologists gave permission to be mentioned by their own name.

Schensul, Schensul, and Le Compte (1999, 91) define participant observation as "the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting." Combining participant observation with a multispecies approach allowed me to engage with both humans and other-than-human beings, such as sheep or deer. I observed, worked along them, and looked for their traces (represented in a few footprints throughout this thesis). As such, I set out to "entangle and align my movements with them", in an attempt to better grasp their life worlds (Tsing 2015, 247). Furthermore, this enabled me to observe and experience how human actors engage with wolves in day-to-day activities. According to O'Reilly (2005, 137), "ethnographic interviewing goes on all the time",

which manifested itself in many informal conversations that took place while, for example, feeding sheep, eating a sandwich at break, or walking through forests.

In addition to spontaneous conversation, I conducted eighteen semi-structured interviews. Most of these were held after establishing initial contacts upon which I based specific interview topics. This allowed me to ask in-depth questions, which added value to the data and analysis of my research (O'Reilly 2005, 141). In-depth interviews provided me with insights into "the private domain of ideas, thoughts, opinions and feelings" and into the "subjective meanings" behind certain actions and practices (O'Reilly 2012, 127). Concretely, it helped me understand the motives behind people's actions, as well as their social imaginaries with respect to other-than-human nature, including wolves.

A third method was (visual) auto-ethnography: my own lived experience (O'Reilly 2012). This allowed me to describe the environment from my own perception and experience, reflected in the vignettes presented in this thesis. Most of these are shaped by my own observations of the landscape and the other-than-human species within it. This method is underpinned by the notion that collaborative survival requires multispecies coordination, and therefore, we must start including them in picturing well-being (Tsing 2015, 155). This is the standpoint that needs further reflection.

### Ethics and Positionality

The fact that I am speaking on 'behalf' of other-than-human species from a position of power and privilege as a human being, can be considered a colonial practice (Davis 2004). A difficult challenge for anthropologists to face, as colonial practices are rightly condemned. In fact, I was not even able to ask other-than-humans' consent to be a participant due to my own limits of communication. How should anthropologists speak to and for other species? This question harks back to an anthropological problem formulated by Arjun Appadurai (1988, 17): "The problem of voice ('speaking for' and 'speaking to') intersects with the problem of place (speaking 'of')." Appadurai (1988, 20) writes: "anthropology survives by its claim to capture other places (and other voices) through its special brand of ventriloquism. It is this claim that needs constant examination." Hence, the ongoing recognition of my own place and voice has been a red thread throughout this multispecies ethnography. I do not assign myself the position to give voice to other-than-humans or "to recognise them as others, visible in their difference" (Kirksey 2010, 562). Rather, I aim to rethink these categories: as Earth-dwellers, we are all alike in our need of assistance from one another (Haraway 2016).

Furthermore, looking at other-than-human communication from a multispecies point of view required me to work beyond my own limits of communication. I have had to search the landscape, be aware of body language of other species and sometimes consider their mere presence, or their traces, as a means of communication (Howe 2019). However, one should remember that all that is written here is my own translation, whether from Dutch to English (the spoken language with human participants was Dutch) or the interpretation of other-than-humans into human understanding.

Ongoing reflection has also been important in my own preconceptions, values, and norms. According to O'Reilly (2012, 100), anthropologists cannot conduct research until they understand the significance of their own physical, sensual, cognitive, analytical, and situated self. My participants' life-worlds, thoughts, and views are mediated through my preoccupations and assumptions (Gusterson 1996, 13). I largely believe that some standard of respect should exist in approaching a (human or not) other. I thus entered this research with a preconceived assumption that all other-than-humans are important and agentic actors, including the wolf, and that humans should rethink their position. However, this research challenged my own stance. My principles have not changed but have certainly been nuanced. Being a farmer's daughter myself, I knew working with animals is not necessarily based on a desire to dominate. However, it was only when working with (industrial) cattle farmers that I realised that it is not only other-than-humans who have been made part of the false promise of progress. I hope to do justice to their story in this thesis.

## Outline

Chapter one offers a detailed description of the assemblage central to the whole study: the Veluwe. A brief history of the Veluwe highlights the role of humans in forming the landscape we know today. The advent of industrialisation processes significantly damaged the assemblage, leading to conservation efforts and the area's fragmentation (Arts, Fischer, and Van der Wal 2012). This chapter situates the wolves' return to a manipulated and fragmented landscape, affecting the way nature is imagined. Furthermore, I highlight how wolves, crossing human-made boundaries, unleash various multispecies anticipatory dynamics within the assemblage. These subsequently inform and challenge social imaginaries of nature.

In chapter two, this thesis turns to the Veluwe's agricultural background. Tsing's (2015) conceptualisation of the Plantationocene unravels how industrial scaling policies, under narratives of growth and progress, left behind a ruined landscape. The chapter explores the

frustrations of farmers who do not feel represented by their government as they must comply with contradicting market forces and environmental regulations. Wolves and their protected status are perceived as an added burden to these pressures. Here, the context of the Veluwe's agricultural development sets the foundation to explore human and other-than-human power relations. These relations are discussed through the socially imagined lens of a Veluwe lacking 'real wild nature', making the area unsuitable for wolves to live in.

Within the Veluwe's fragmented landscape, chapter three analyses how wolves relate to human-made boundaries, such as fences. Donna Haraway's (2008) concept of becoming-with, and experiences of people in the area, provide foundation to this thesis' argument that general predictions about the species lack foundation. Wolves ought to be considered in the context of their assemblages. Within the Veluwe assemblage, wolves challenge social imaginaries by crossing fences and imagined boundaries. I argue how such imaginaries are rooted in nature-culture or wild-domestic binaries; a distinction often made to secure economic progress (Drenthen 2015; 2021). Accordingly, this chapter works towards the argument that wolves currently challenge alienation and scalability, features of the Plantationocene (Tsing 2015).

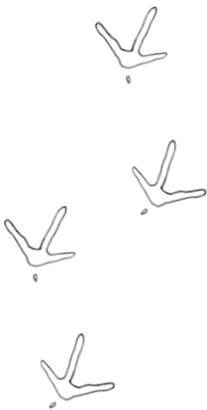
Finally, chapter five argues that shepherding plays an important role in deconstructing scalability and challenging ideas of progress and growth. In contrast to protecting economic assets, Shepherds use fences in a way that allows them to pursue their collaborative work in creating conditions for the heathlands to thrive again. Analysing shepherding's daily activities, this chapter shows shepherds' adaptation to the return of wolves and discusses the social imaginaries underlying their willingness to share territory with wolves. Finally, Tsing's (2015) domestication-as-rewilding is put forward to frame wolves, shepherds, sheep, and dogs' collaboration and offers hopeful insights into the co-existence of multiple species within the damaged Veluwe landscape.



Image 3. Veluwe forest  
Photographer: Eelke Lenstra

Look, we as humans are very keen to intervene and then the wolf must go. The animal should be hunted down again, so to speak, and we want to take care of it ourselves with that gun, you know. If you look at what we have already destroyed in nature, it is gigantic. So many connections have been broken. And everything that bothers us has to go; if the house sparrows in the city bother us, it has to go, or gulls or other animals. Yes, if something bothers people, it must go, that's how humans are. And I grew up in this house here, and that area used to be so alive, in the spring, the lapwings, the curlews, a real spectacle, water birds, real wild ducks, it was alive. And now? Now nothing at all, empty, an empty landscape.

[Simon, shepherd, 30 March 2022]



## 1. Situating the wolf's return in the (South-West) Veluwe

The first step in gaining an understanding of wolves and the way they (re)construct the Veluwe landscape, is to contextualise the situation in which they have returned: a situation with a history of manipulability. Starting at the soil, tracing back its subjection to human alteration ever since the Ice Age, provides a foundation for understanding nature-culture imaginaries. For humans, other-than-humans, and soil are inextricably linked (DeLoughrey 2011). Change on Earth, in and of itself, is not the problem; the pace and distribution of change certainly is, as (eco)systems struggle to adapt (Haraway 2016, 73). This kind of change, driven by industrialisation, is a precarious one (Tsing 2015, 20-21). Subsequently, I outline today's (South-West) Veluwe as a region characterised by industrial agriculture and as one fragmented by all kinds of organisations. As these organisations try to reclaim land from agriculture, tensions arise, and imaginaries are challenged about what nature entails. Ultimately, the presence of wolves, centred within this large field of tension, result in various anticipatory dynamics as humans and other-than-humans begin to adapt their behaviours within the assemblage (Jansman 2021, 39-40; Stephan and Flaherty 2019).

### A history of manipulability in the (South-West) Veluwe

Large parts of the Veluwe are historically shaped by accumulations of soil and rock left behind by moving glaciers, providing the area with height differences (Gans 2006). Over time, the extremely cold conditions gave way to warmer ones, and while ice no longer reached the Netherlands, the soil remained permanently frozen, also known as permafrost (Koster and Van der Meer 2013). As water and wind carved patterns through the landscape, and sand – freed up by the retreating *Zuiderzee* – was blown across the Veluwe, the sandy soils of the Veluwe were formed (Gans 2006). With the ice gone, both people and trees, among other flora and fauna, began to arrive (Brouwer 2008, 35-41). Slowly but surely, the area was shaped into a biodiverse habitat for many species, including both wolves and humans (Martin, Chamailé-Jammes, and Waller 2020, 784). By the end of the Middle Ages, open patches of land began to appear. Growing populations cut down forests and whole areas around villages were overgrazed by sheep and cows into (initially tree-rich and vegetated) heathlands (Brouwer 2008, 102; Diemont et al. 2013, 191).

Moreover, the rough areas between settlements served as community property, where inhabitants grazed their sheep during the day and collected heather for animal fodder (Diemont et al. 2013, 78). Animal manure was taken to the farming fields once a year as fertiliser and

little by little, soil nutrients were displaced from the heathland towards farming fields (Elbersen et al. 2003, 17-18). The already nutrient-poor heathlands became even poorer due to this specific agricultural practice and its exploitation prevented forests from developing again (Bastiaens and Deforce 2005). Eventually, this led to the disappearance of the heathlands and the emergence of bare sandy soil which, blown together by the wind, formed sand shifts (Bastiaens and Deforce 2005). To prevent sand from reaching farming fields, rows of trees and wooden fences were erected between the heathland and the fields (Brouwer 2008). Such markings allude to early distinctions between so-called culture and nature, as they emerged from a sense of discomfort among humans who were determined to protect agriculture from the outset (Drenthen 2021).

As agricultural areas expanded, species were left with fewer opportunities to co-exist with humans and the presence of wolves began to pose a threat to that which lied at the foundation of these farming systems; the cattle (Marvin 2012, 101). Domesticated animals became the property of whoever maintained a relationship of care and control over them. Investing time, financial means and attachment into these animals, keepers inserted domesticated animals into human economy, and consequently, into their social and cultural world (Newsome 2018). It is within this process that the wolf was completely exterminated in the Netherlands hundred-fifty years ago, leaving humans unhindered in the expansion of farming land (Marvin 2012).

However, it was not until early industrial developments in the 1900s that environmental conditions became seriously critical to the ongoing existence of life on Earth (Tsing 2015, 1), including life in the Veluwe (Jansman 2021, 36). The invention of artificial fertilisers, for example, led to an incredible surge in agricultural production, reducing the need for sheep manure and making it possible to cultivate poor heathlands into farmlands. Subsequently, heathlands almost disappeared and with them all kinds of critters, including shepherds, sheep, and dogs, leaving behind anything but a varied, diverse, and messy ecosystem (Diemont et al. 2013). Such industrial transformations left the Veluwe an ecologically simplified landscape with large green patches and trees of the same species arranged in straight lines (Brouwer 2008, 325).

As populations grew and ideas of industrial progress were gaining ground, so did the demand for meat and dairy products (De Bakker and Dagevos 2012). As a consequence, global meat production has seen a more than fourfold increase over the last fifty years (Ritchie and Roser 2017). Farmers expanded their livestock, and as Bas (Fieldnotes, 22 March 2022), a shepherd in the Veluwe, fittingly put it: "the industry has even infiltrated the animals

themselves.” He refers to the notion that the bodies of animals could not escape the industrial transformations either, for the general motivation became to learn how much milk or meat could possibly be obtained from cows or sheep, despite all negative implications for the animals themselves (Barkema et al. 2015). The *Veluws Heideschaap* (Veluwe’s Heath sheep), for example, having adapted to the meagre sandy soils of the heath, could not provide enough profit, and subsequently almost disappeared (Stichting Zeldzame Huisdierrassen n.d.).

Scaling industries to meet increasing production demands also posed a threat to the soil and air of the Veluwe, affecting many forms of life up until today (Gies, Kros, and Voogd 2021). Since the mid-1800s, the amount of nitrogen in the environment has tripled (Oenema 2008, 2). Alongside traffic and industry, intensive industrial farming is a major contributor to the ‘nitrogen crisis’ (Naujokienė et al. 2021). Ammonia, a component of nitrogen, is released through manure. While ammonia itself is not a problem, it can become harmful when too much of it is produced. Certain plant species are pushed out as it allows brambles, nettles, and grasses to proliferate, depriving many reptiles, insects, and birds, among others, of their source of livelihood (Naujokienė et al. 2021). One such victim is the black grouse, which was unable to sustain itself after the diversified vegetation on the heath was taken over by grass and many of the insects it relied on struggled (De Graaff 2015; Jansman et al. 2014). Nitrogen in the soil has also been found to contribute to global warming (Naujokienė et al. 2021), which has visible effects in the Veluwe too. Several participants, who know the heath inside and out, expressed their concern when due to extreme drought, none of the heathland flowered in August (Fieldnotes, March 2022). Excessive production of reactive nitrogen in recent decades can be partly attributed to the ever-growing numbers of cattle (Naujokienė et al. 2021). Their abundance reflects the forces of supply and demand that respond to an overpopulation of people within societies of mass consumption (De Bakker and Dagevos 2012). In the current system, which is driven by capitalist forces and ideas about wealth, more people equal more cattle, and therefore, more pollutive nitrogen (Haraway 2016, 203; Naujokienė et al. 2021). These industrial processes are noticeable in today’s Veluwe landscapes.

### Today’s (South-West) Veluwe

This section portrays the South-West Veluwe as I encountered it, an area characterised by heathlands, sandy plains, and forests, and relatively sparsely populated by people. Most villages and towns are situated on the edges of the area (Diemont et al. 2013, 157). Large farms with vast, flat green meadows characterise parts of the landscape in the South-West Veluwe.

Although there are fewer farms in the Veluwe today than there were some fifty years ago, those that do remain, in line with national trends, enormously increased in scale (Bont et al. 2007). Despite having less space available around their houses, people living in densely populated areas such as Ede can get out into nature in no time. They are often accompanied by their unleashed dog, whom they are only too happy to give some freedom, despite the many signs throughout the area telling them otherwise. Most of the forest or heathland visitors I spoke to appeared not to be particularly bothered by the possibility of wolves roaming the same area as they were. As long as they, or their dogs, would not get into trouble (Fieldnotes, February-March 2022).

Many participants told me that the Covid-19 pandemic and its home-bounding lockdowns has added a new layer of popularity to spending time in nature, often to the frustration of people working in the area, such as forester Henry: "nature is suddenly hot" (Fieldnotes, 22 February 2022). In 2020, the Veluwe was the most popular national holiday area among Dutch people (Provincie Gelderland n.d.): "But who can blame these people? It is beautiful here, isn't it?", a visitor once told me when we discussed how crowded it was on the heath (Fieldnotes, 02 March 2022). The following vignette exemplifies the ability of the Veluwe to impress and attract so many at first glance. When observed closely, however, it unfolds itself as a damaged landscape.

It is my first day of fieldwork and my aunt does not hesitate to be my tour guide for the upcoming period. After all, she knows the area like the back of her hand. She even did some preliminary work. Enthusiastically, she tells me she has already cycled past the shepherd in the neighbourhood recently: "I have given him a little introduction to your arrival", she tells me with a big smile. "Come on, let's pay him a visit right away" (Fieldnotes, 08 February 2022). As we take the bicycles out of the garage, I think to myself that she must be mistaken. *Shepherds? They don't exist anymore, do they? She must mean a sheep farmer.*

We soon find ourselves between endless rows of pine trees, arranged in tight lines like an army of soldiers preparing for battle. Now and then, the forest makes room for some green agricultural fields. These are the first days of February. I feel a cold shiver, the trees and plants seem to be in their wintry mode, and the birds are probably still on their way. But there, in the distance, I see it coming. Suddenly, it feels like I am no longer in the Netherlands. What a breath-taking view. Sloping hills with heather bushes filled with a kind of rough grass sticking out, giving the terrain a brown glow, purple moor-grass I would later find out. Almost the Savanah. As we cycle between the slopes, an old-fashioned-looking barn appears, with a low-

slung thatched roof. The space fills up with the sound of sheep bleating and bells jingling. This doesn't look like the sheep farms I knew from my childhood.

I am welcomed by two happily wagging Border Collies. Shepherd Simon comes up behind them, a middle-aged man, dressed in earthy tones, with a friendly face and a calm appearance. He welcomes me and asks us, after I inform him of the reason of my being there, to follow him through the barn to his canteen. We follow a path with sheep on either side, seemingly unconcerned by two unfamiliar faces. They have just been fed. This breed is unknown to me, and I let shepherd Simon tell me that it is a very old breed, the Veluwe's Heath sheep, which has adapted to the barren heathland.

As we enter his canteen, we find ourselves in a small room with a large window through which we can get a good view of the whole flock. "I've already seen him. The wolf I mean. He already paid us a visit in the fields!", Simon (Fieldnotes, 08 February 2022) says, without me sensing any bitterness in his voice. Despite my somewhat surprised reaction, he continues: "Yes, and not much later he was shot and dumped by the side of the road. The poor animal." My attention moves to his wall, which is full of all kinds of pictures and newspaper cuttings. "Learning to live with the wolf in the Veluwe", titles a newspaper adorning a prominent spot on his wall. "We acted immediately when we heard that there were wolves in this area. It was quite an investment to place the wolf-proof grids, and it takes a bit more work, but it is worth it. We can continue to do our work on the heath" (Simon, fieldnotes 08 February 2022). When I ask what that work entails, it turns out that Simon is affiliated to one of the many organisations that divide up the nature reserve. Together with his dogs and sheep, he is employed to graze the heathland in attempt to improve biodiversity, and in particular, to minimise the invasive grass species created by nitrogen deposition: the purple moor-grass. I realise the very thing that surprised me - the resemblance of the Netherlands to the Savannah - is, in fact, something to be surprised about. It is not supposed to look like that at all.

The above vignette sketches out a landscape which has endured sustained degradation. A landscape subjected to ongoing exploitation. Capitalist tendencies have alienated many of the Veluwe's key actors and the disentanglement of life forms enabled further accumulation and exploitation (Tsing 2015, 133). What becomes clear is the Veluwe today is far removed from the biodiverse landscape it once was (Diemont et al. 2013). In this light, the Veluwe corresponds to the landscape that Tsing (2015) describes as a capitalist ruin. By following a mushroom emerging in these landscapes heavily damaged by capitalist processes, she highlights how in the ruins left behind new forms of multispecies living are generated.

Wolves, as new actors within the Veluwe assemblage, have similar abilities to emerge within capitalist ruins. Their disruptive presence, eating sheep and crossing into inhabited areas, has set in motion a number of anticipatory dynamics that serve to contain them (Stephan and Flaherty 2019). As Simon states, investments are made, fences erected, and extra hours are put in to ensure the sheep's safety. Wolves, it appears, are imagined by most of these shepherds as part of their work on ecological restoration within capitalist ruins and, therefore, as part of their day-to-day world. Thus, imaginaries of the wolf within industrialised landscapes play a role in how anticipation is nurtured.

### Imagining the wolf in a damaged landscape

Today, the Veluwe maintains a large industrial sector that has been compelled to expand their livestock and to intensify their methods, resulting in years of large-scale ecological degradation (Gies, Kros, and Voogd 2021; Strijdhorst 2019). However, many farms and fields in the South-West Veluwe have been bought up by governmental or privatised nature organisations to "give back to nature", to use my aunt's expression (Fieldnotes, 21 February 2022). Since the 1980s, they have worked to preserve the heathland, which would otherwise become monotonously overgrown with grasses and trees (Diemont et al. 2013). While shepherds, like Simon, have grown out of the mere nostalgic function they once held, I argue they now play a role in deconstructing social imaginaries. These imaginaries are characterised by ideas of cattle keeping and nature as opposed to one another, in which there is no room for wolves. Subsequently, this section explores the (multispecies) anticipatory dynamics, informing or challenging such imaginaries. Among the actors anticipating for wolves are shepherds, working with sheep to restore ecologies damaged by industrial transformations (Diemont et al. 2013, 221).

Despite this, many shepherds, and nearly all other human interlocutors I spoke to, are less appreciative the South-West Veluwe's fragmentation. Apart from a few private individual property owners, the area is now in the hands of a number of organisations, including the Ministry of Defence, *Staatsbosbeheer* (state forestry), *Natuurmonumenten* (private environmental organisation), *Geldersch Landschap* (government environmental organisation) and the Hoge Veluwe National Park, all dependent on different sources of funding. Whereas *Natuurmonumenten* relies on subsidies and its affiliated members, governmental organisations are strongly informed by current political climates, leading to a highly divided area with inconsistent and sometimes conflicting policies. Moreover, some organisations can afford to

prioritise ecological interests while others are still (partly) reliant on disruptive plantations and logging (Fieldnotes, March-April 2022). This is how Daan (Interview, 22 March 2022), an avid hunter with whom I spent an evening in a hunting lodge talking about the return of the wolf, expressed his thoughts on the fragmentation of the area:

[...] we are incredibly at the top of the wealth scale. So, we can also afford to almost use our country, the Netherlands, as a garden and we are all working in our own little garden. [...] we are playing around, and there is no consistent policy. But in nature, you can't do things differently every time. Then you haven't seen [the results of] one thing and you're already stepping into a new one.

Regardless of one's stance towards the wolf, Daan's point of view is frequently shared by many of my participants and, as such, seems to transcend all differences of opinion. These statements depict a certain imagined manipulability of the Dutch landscape, in which humans are the main engineers (Haraway 2016). Some condemn this manipulative way of dealing with the Veluwe landscape and argue for the necessity of further control, by referring to the landscape's inability to sustain itself. Within this imaginary of the landscape, the wolf has little freedom of movement, but imposed control allows humans to continually regulate their whereabouts and that of other-than-human nature. According to Daan (Interview, 22 March 2022), manipulation and fragmentation has left us in a situation where letting go of this state of control is hardly feasible:

To simply say, we're going to take our hands off, [...] you create a situation that is not natural. We do not have nature anymore. I believe that in the Netherlands, where we have cultivated everything, where we want to determine everything, we as humans also have a duty to intervene in terms of population. [...] We just have to keep on managing in the Netherlands, I think.

The presence of wolves, and their protected status, in the Veluwe thus challenges people to reconsider their own position in a multispecies world, and to reflect on the meaning of nature. People like Daan, who advocate for the need to maintain or increase control, seem to imagine nature, and simultaneously the wolf, as something that should be wild (Pluskowski 2006). As something far away from humans and of their manipulated other-than-human infrastructures. As far away as possible from culture. Anticipation of wolves coming close to humans suggests that nature reserves are to be fenced off completely or populations ought to be managed through

controlled hunting (NOS 2022a). This thinking reflects the current situation in the South-West Veluwe, which is divided, on the one hand, in areas where some species are allowed to live and, on the other, in zero-tolerance areas where animals are shot upon entering (Boonman-Berson, Driessen, and Turnhout 2019).

In addition to villages and towns, zero-tolerance areas often include agricultural grounds, requiring animals to stay in areas to which they have been allocated, preventing them from damaging harvests. This bothers ecologist and wolf-expert Hugh Jansman (Interview, 05 April 2022) “[...] because now it is portions of nature in a desert of intensive agriculture, every animal that puts a paw out of nature is immediately seen as damage and nuisance.” Any damage to systems of agriculture translates to economic loss, and it is the importance placed upon these economic interests that is largely at the root of tensions within wolf debates (Drenthen 2021). The considerable financial investments made by farmers in scaling up their farms over several decades makes this issue particularly sensitive. Henry, a state-employed forester, carries a gun, ready to shoot animals crossing human-made boundaries. He remarks that allowing animals to move freely requires an inherent acceptance towards damage, especially economic damage. However, as long as humans prioritise damage limitation, they “[...] will always be turning those knobs” (Interview, 20 April 2022). Any possibility for improvements to biodiversity in the area because of the return of the wolf, for example, are mitigated by the fact that humans will always feel the need to intervene before any damage is done. The return of wolves to the (South-West) Veluwe, considered less manageable animals, unleashes varying anticipatory dynamics among human stakeholders.

However, humans are not the only ones anticipating for wolves. Two things have become apparent among deer and boar populations since the first wolves arrived in the Veluwe: (1) fewer offspring survived, eaten by wolves, and (2) deer behaving differently (Fieldnotes, February-April 2022). Forester Mark has worked in fauna management for 35 years now. Since wolves are active in the area, he keeps a close eye on other-than-human dynamics. As we walk through the resting area (prohibited for visitors), he tells me about his observations of deer so far, and notes that predicting where animals might be is becoming increasingly difficult. With a top predator around, deer are grouping differently and raise their heads more often to look out for danger. “The animals also have to become cleverer, [...] [they] simply anticipate, they adapt very quickly” (Mark, interview, 11 March 2022). Wolves could play a role in regulating deer and wild boar populations who, in their numbers, prevent trees from growing and damage valuable soil ecosystems by eating seedlings and churning up the soil (Jansman et al. 2021; Ouden, Lammertsma, and Jansman 2020). Such changes within the assemblage may, in the

long term, have some positive effect on the resurgence of the heathlands and forests of the Veluwe. However, whether this will happen and on what scale within a highly fragmented Veluwe is something that only time shall tell (Ouden, Lammertsma, and Jansman 2020).

### Wolves making their way through a damaged (South-West) Veluwe - Concluding remarks

The landscape wolves came back to is an assemblage of human and other-than-human actors, manipulated since the arrival of humans (Diemont et al. 2013). Critically exploited and damaged after the rise of industrial formations, and with more space attributed to industrial agriculture, less space was left for other species. After declines in biodiversity, growing awareness of the effects of industrialisation gave rise to conservation efforts within these capitalist ruins (Diemont et al. 2013). Shepherding was reintroduced to restore the heath, and wolves were given a protected status.

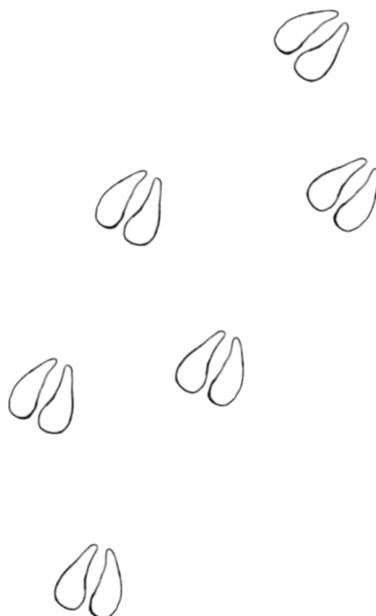
The damaged and fragmented landscape, characteristic of the (South-West) Veluwe, is seen as an example of how the whole area is subjugated to human manipulation. As a result, nature became imagined as not real or wild and, therefore, as not suitable for a wolf to roam in. The wolves' reappearance shapes anticipations stemming from a need for human control. Humans' economic interests play a significant role here. Yet anticipation is also present in animals, who, with the presence of a predator, have altered their behaviours. Whether this will ultimately benefit multispecies flourishing within a landscape dominated by industrial agriculture is questionable (Ouden, Lammertsma, and Jansman 2020). Wolves, making their way through the landscape, however, seems to threaten the continued existence of at least some part of this sector: industrial sheep farming.



Image 4. Tracks in the Veluwe heathland  
Photographer: Eelke Lenstra

How is it that nowadays so much [food] can go abroad? Because we have decided that we can produce lots in places where wild animals are no longer allowed. We shoot them for damage control, or the area is fenced off, so production can go up, and we can export it since we don't need all that food for the Netherlands. If we opened up the area for them, production would go down, but then the companies that export it would have less income. Meaning we would need to generate money in some other way, but we are stuck in this economy. And that is just how it is. If I get a tenner today, I want eleven euros tomorrow. And in twenty days I want 25 euros. We always want more. But nature has its limits.

[Henry, forester, interview, 20 April 2022]



## 2. Industrialisation of agriculture - a wolf in sheep's clothing

This chapter explores the conditions surrounding industrial sheep farming, and the maintenance thereof, as a challenge in co-existing with wolves. Situating this industry, and its history, in a larger context of ecological degradation, leads us first to consider the Plantationocene (Tsing 2015). In so doing, we find that a scale-driven industry - operating under the capitalistic narrative of growth and progress - leads to the commodification of other-than-human nature, with pollution and ecological disruption as the result (Haraway 2016; Tsing 2015). Tsing's (2015, 63) salvage accumulation, as a means for capitalists to take advantage of ecologies' capacities, helps us understand what role industrial agriculture plays within the context of the South-West Veluwe assemblage.

Finally, this chapter goes on to consider farmers positions within economies of scale (Meerburg et al. 2009). Hereby, the wolf's protected status, bears an added burden to the industry, resulting in a decrease in trust towards governments and environmentalists. Finally, wolf-sceptics' imagination of Dutch nature as not being 'real nature' is brought forward to underpin their point of view.

### The Plantationocene's grip on the (South-West) Veluwe

*It has something serene and disturbing at the same time, I think to myself as I cycle through the vast empty green plains heading for the farm I am going to visit. Today, I meet a sheep farmer and 850 sheep. Some of them at least, as the others find themselves on a different patch of grass a long way from the farm. I was not able to discover that specific patch, for despite all the farms that I passed, I could only count a few horses standing outside. As I park my bike and take my boots out of my pannier, I remember shepherd Simon's warning: "Clean your boots well afterwards. If you visit such a sheep farm and then go somewhere else, you can easily spread diseases" (Simon, fieldnotes, 09 February 2022).*

The previous vignette introduces the Veluwe as an industrialised ecology. One manipulated to facilitate features of capitalism, as this section exemplifies. Over time, forests were replaced by large grass plains for cattle farming. These plains remain empty for large parts of the year as most cattle are kept inside (Buizer, Arts, and Westerink 2016, 454). Shepherd Simon has lived and worked in the Veluwe for 62 years. He has seen the area undergo drastic changes: "It was a very beautiful area, a very rich area, but it is over. It is empty. [...] That's a pity" (Fieldnotes, 10 March 2022). The threat of disease spread is one example of the fragility of industrialised agriculture. Sheep, packed in barns, are more susceptible to diseases

and build weaker immune systems (McKellar 2006). It is not surprising that shepherds like Simon are weary of these industrialised sheep farms.

Some anthropologists, like Tsing (2015; 2017) and Haraway (2016), argue that environmental collapse is not the result of natural human behaviour alone, but of the specific interaction between humans and other-than-human nature, driven by economic gains. The starting point of ecological degradation, they believe, did not occur with the onset of human species, but rather with the emergence of modern capitalism, which has driven the destruction of landscapes and ecologies (Haraway 2016, 50). Consequently, the Plantationocene was put forward to connect the climate crisis to capitalistic and political practices of exploitation, representing the continuing socio-environmental effects of cultivating life and other species (Davis et al. 2019).

Sheep, cows, and chickens, among many other animals kept on farms in the Veluwe, are such species. These beings, kept in large numbers to keep up with market demands, are claimed as source of income and need large plantations to exist (e.g., corn plantations) (De Bakker and Dagevos 2012, 878). As such, approaching animals solely as sources of income has led people to no longer regard them as living beings but rather as commodities – offering financial value (Bovenkerk and Keulartz 2021, 184). Not only their wool, meat, or milk is commodified, but animal's entire existence is subjected to industrialisation processes. Turning living beings into resources for the purpose of wealth concentration is something Tsing (2015) refers to as salvage accumulation, which she identifies as a working feature of capitalism. Hereby, industries like industrial agriculture do not only benefit from, but are entirely reliant on, the generation of wealth without having control over the way commodities are produced (Tsing 2015, 63). Through salvage accumulation, natural processes are commodified and exploited. Capitalist restructure ecologies by taking advantage of the fact that ewes give birth to lambs, and cows produce milk (Tsing 2015, 63). In the context of industrial farming, salvage accumulation translates violence and pollution into profit (Tsing 2015, 64), as the continuation of the vignette illustrates:

In the shed, I run into a family who seems to be well aware of how things work around here. Even little Joris, who with his slightly oversized blue overalls and striking blond curls triumphantly strides through the stable with a bottle under his arm, heading for the lamb he is determined to feed. Shifting my attention to the other animals, I spot several ewes who are about to give birth. They look as if they might explode at any moment. New mothers are separated from the rest and placed with their children in a smaller compartment only slightly larger than themselves. Aware that I am on a sheep farm specialised in the production of meat

sheep, I ask farmer Sven at what age the lambs go to slaughter. If they are rams, or not suitable for breeding, they are slaughtered when they are about six months old, I am told.

Farmer Sven, a man in his early forties, with farm life running through his veins, as he later lets me know, points out all his triplets and quadruplets. He guides me to a quadruplet of which he is extra proud and tells me that two of them must be taken away from the mother, because she cannot handle them all. When I ask if they are going to bottle-feed all these removed lambs, as Joris just did, he replies that, “luckily, I have a milking machine for that” (Sven, fieldnotes 09 April 2022).

One of the sheep catches my eye, she has started bleating so loud that she is almost hoarse. Suddenly, I see farmer Sven picking up an unmoving body by its legs, which he then lifts over the fence onto the concrete floor. It is a dead lamb. The bleating sheep turns out to be the mother and she is pushing it even harder now. “Too bad, this was one of my biggest” says farmer Sven (Fieldnotes, 09 April 2022), looking somewhat disappointed. He then asks me to push the distressed sheep against the wall so that he can take her milk to make cheese. To avoid making the situation awkward, I do what he asks. It is anything but an easy thing to do, as she is fighting to get away, communicating that we are not to touch her. And yet, we do it anyway.

While death is a part of any ecosystem, from the above vignette, it can be argued that animals in an industrial environment have become part of a system dedicated to large-scale production. This serves a consumer society which does not necessarily ensure human survival or maintain a functioning ecosystem. If anything, it does the exact opposite, often disrupting the ecosystem (Thompson 2021). Selectively breeding the ewes to produce more lambs, not letting them live past the age of six, using milking machines after separation from their mothers, and the creation of the perfect conditions for proliferation of diseases (McKellar 2006); all in favour of the concentration of wealth. In industrial settings such as these, we see salvage accumulation taking its course by capitalising on other-than-human nature (Tsing 2015, 63).

In fact, it is a liberalised market system that enabled salvage accumulation to get its hold on the Dutch agricultural sector (Buizer, Arts, and Westerink 2016). From 1950 onwards, Dutch agricultural policy focused on specialisation and increasing scale. Farmers were pushed by banks, insurance companies and pension funds to invest in the upscaling, specialisation, and intensification of their farming activities (Bieleman 2003). Agriculture was conceived as an economic activity, to which everything else had to be submitted. Not complying, in such a competitive world market meant they simply could not survive (Bieleman 2003). Ong (2006, 4) questions this way of governing by stressing its strategic approach to influencing population

and space for the primary purpose of maximising profit. She goes on to claim that it is precisely this dynamic that sustains hegemonic structures and reinforces inequality.

### Farmers stuck in scalable economies

This section discusses how Dutch farmers today find themselves trapped in a scalable economy, pursuing growth, accumulating debts through loans and investments, while at the same time drastically altering the composition of the assemblage (Meerburg et al. 2009). According to the *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* (CBS 2022), a statistical research bureau collecting statistics on Dutch societal processes, six out of seven farms in the Netherlands disappeared in the period 1950-2016. However, those that remained grew larger: in size – going from an average of 5.7 hectares in 1950 to 32.4 hectares today –, or in number of animals per farm – from an average of seven pigs in 1950 to 1.6 thousand meat pigs today. The average number of cows per farm rose from thirteen to almost 160 animals.<sup>2</sup>

Despite having slept little after his interview on the Netherlands' largest radio station the day before, and his preparations for a farmers' protest in The Hague, activist and sheep farmer Max, makes some time for me. In his kitchen, we talk about the current state of agriculture in the Netherlands. The Veluwe's "barren areas, sandy soils and heathlands" he tells me, "are perfect for cattle farming, as the global economy makes it possible for cattle not to feed on what is available to them in the area" (Max, interview, 06 April 2022). In the Netherlands, "investments have been made for years to make [the land] more productive, more efficient, and more specialised" (Max, interview, 06 April 2022). As a result, grain cultivation is pushed out to other countries, ignoring the fact that it "would be better for biodiversity" (Max, interview, 06 April 2022).

Dutch agricultural policy of the last decades has focused heavily on scaling up, intensification, and specialisation of cattle farming (Meerburg et al. 2009). In my conversations with Veluwe farmers, shepherds, foresters and hunters about this situation, only economic progress and global market forces were put forward as key incentives. This seems to indicate

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<sup>2</sup> Due to advantageous subsidies, the sheep population increased to two million animals in 1992. In 2021, there are still 848,406. Of these, approximately 67,000 are situated in the Veluwe, of which 19,000 in South-West Veluwe. Sheep are often kept as a side activity, next to, for instance, a dairy farm, given the relatively low labour intensity (CBS 2022).

the significance placed on achieving profitability at the cost of the ecosystems in which they operate (Tsing 2015). However, what appears to go unnoticed within these narratives of growth and progress is that life on planet Earth is founded on interspecies entanglements and dependency. Whether agricultural or not, growth requires extraction from the planet, but the planet has its limits (Blühdorn 2009, 3).

Moreover, public pressure to become more sustainable is increasing and for farmers, this implies further investments in organic alternatives, complying with regulations, and loss of revenue when scaling down (Runhaar 2017, 343). When I ask farmer Max (Interview, 06 April 2022) how he would feel about earning more with fewer animals and therefore with less 'production', he answers:

That would be great, but it will not work within a globalising world economy. [...] As long as the global market is in place, you cannot say that we are going to reduce our production here. And you know that if you keep to this globalising system, it will just come from somewhere else, and the supermarkets will simply make that choice.

In this sense, sheep, cows, or other animals that are part of the industry, are not the only species in the Plantationocene trapped in systems of scale (Tsing 2015). Farmers too, whose livelihoods come under pressure from various sides are finding it difficult to meet contradicting demands (Meerburg et al. 2009; Runhaar 2017). While, on the one hand, global market forces continue to urge for expansion and production at the lowest possible cost, on the other, farmers are strained by all kinds of environmental measures (Buizer, Arts, and Westerink 2016). Sven (Interview, 09 April 2022), who, like many other farmers in the South-West Veluwe, lives close to a protected nature reserve, expresses his frustration about this:

What is going on is that our government has decided on rules for nature reserves that are so low in nitrogen deposition that in fact no activities are possible. And what is the easiest thing to sacrifice? Yes, the farmers, while for example the air traffic can continue to grow. There is a lot of discussion and decision making about us and we do not recognise ourselves in it. Can you believe it? It is not ok to be pressured to become bigger and then be silenced.

Sven exemplifies the dissatisfaction felt by many farmers within the current industrialised agricultural system. Market forces combined with environmental measures have pushed them into a corner of which no escape seems possible (Buizer, Arts, and Westerink 2016). Thus, it

is mainly the farmer who must pay the price for the negative consequences of the Plantationocene (Buizer, Arts, and Westerink 2016; Tsing 2015 62). With a lack of governmental support, the re-emergence of the wolf, and its untouchable status, only intensifies the feeling that their needs are not being represented or heard by decision makers.

### Wolves' state of protection

For the further development of ecosystems, wolves today are a protected species throughout the European Union (Wolven in Nederland 2015). Apex consumers like wolves can improve the healthy functioning of ecosystems (Jansman 2021). Enabling species to come back to an environment from which they have disappeared, for instance, allows forests to regenerate and reduces the need for active human management of wildlife populations (Perino et al. 2019). However, highlighting wolves' assigned state of protection reveals the tensions between agricultural and environmental protection interests. I then link these tensions to underlying imaginaries rooted in nature-culture binaries but call attention to oversimplifications.

Many farmers and other stakeholders I encountered and talked to in the South-West Veluwe, did not agree with the current protected status of the wolf. These actors seemed to make a distinction between agriculture and nature areas while imagining where a wolf belongs. There appears to be a tendency to separate large profit-driven monotonous plantations from areas where wild animals like wolves are imagined belonging. Wolves cannot be harmed under European law and therefore endanger farmers' profits when crossing human-made boundaries as they have no recourse against them. Eva is a sheep farmer and a board member of NowolvesBenelux - "the only wolf-critical platform in the Benelux", as stated on their website (NowolvesBenelux n.d.b). She expresses a desire for policymaking that would allow people on agricultural grounds to keep wolves out, that is, to be shot upon entering. By doing so, Eva points to an underlying social imaginary shaped by a wild-domestic binary. She goes on to exemplify this binary: "[...] wolves fit in nature reserves where they have natural prey and not in the countryside where they can walk everywhere. [...] we must make sure they stay outside those [agricultural] areas where they just don't fit, where they don't have their habitat" (Interview, 16 February 2022). Cassidy and Mullin (2007) argue such human tendencies to dominate and control their environment, even when considered wild, gives rise to interspecies power relations. This is particularly evident in the demarcation of areas where 'nature is allowed to take its course' to a greater extent than in cultural areas. In line with nature-culture binaries, distinguishing wild from domestic, and thus controlling where a wolf (considered wild and thus

part of nature) should or should not be able to live in order to secure what is domesticated (considered part of culture), serves as an illustrative example of these power relations brought about by binary thinking (Bovenkerk and Keulartz 2021; Drenthen 2015).

However, many wolf-sceptics I spoke to throughout the Veluwe challenged an oversimplification of this notion. Even areas labelled as nature are imagined to be culture by most participants since humans have manipulated and controlled everything already in the Netherlands. While Sven's farm is surrounded by empty meadows, only interspersed with a few other farms, a very different landscape can be found just a stone's throw away. Namely, that of a nature reserve. Yet, despite the dissemblance and the different labels attached to them (nature versus agriculture), Sven (Interview, 09 April 2022) does not consider the nature reserve to be real nature:

It is selling an ideal story that you want to implement in a situation that is not nature. A small, created nature in which people continually intervene, and then you put in a prey animal that is not allowed to be controlled? I think people would be a more capable manager in this ecosystem situation.

Although Sven does not deny the natural value of wolves in an ecosystem, he does claim that the ecosystem of the Veluwe, in particular, is not suitable for hosting wolves. Even nature reserves controlled by humans in the area, become part of their cultural imagination. This line of argumentation reinforces human and other-than-human power relations that are inherent to his suggestion that humans should maintain their position of supremacy, reflected in the last sentence of the quote. Furthermore, most wolf-sceptics I spoke to did not describe the wolf as an inherently bad animal – on the contrary, they were sometimes even praised for their role within an ecosystem. However, the fact that the Veluwe has been subject to years of human intervention and control is used as the basis of the argument that it could not be made a home for wolves. As such, wolf-sceptics do not find it appropriate that wolves remain protected in the Veluwe.

Sheep and goat farmers, especially on an industrial scale, are the stakeholders most affected by the protected status of the wolf. They, and their economic interests, are the ones particularly susceptible to wolf attacks as their small cattle are often left unattended in fields, only protected by a wire fence. Easy prey for a wandering wolf. Even cows seem to have been targeted by wolves in the Netherlands (Thijssen 2022). As a result, with their return to the

Netherlands – Europe's largest dairy and meat exporter (CBS 2021) – wolves pose a threat to a large part of a significantly developed and established agricultural sector.

However, wolf-proofing measures can be taken to protect cattle, such as a specific protective fence (1.20 metres high with 4.5 kV electric tension) and/or herd guard dogs (BIJ12 n.d.). An additional benefit is that they also serve to keep out unleashed dogs and foxes, which remain the biggest threat to sheep each year (Jansman et al. 2021). I spent an afternoon talking to several farmers associated to NowolvesBenelux. They, alongside other farmers, argue that these measures are not feasible and too labour-intensive for today's farming sector. After all, for the electric current to work, no grass can grow against electric fences, meaning that farmers must spend a lot of time mowing big patches of grass around their fence. Extra labour for which they are not compensated (Fieldnotes, 16 February 2022). Besides, subsidies (implemented to financially support farmers in protecting their cattle) were not always given out without difficulties. For instance, during a local wolf information meeting, I spoke to an emotional Nel, a middle-aged farmer who runs a sheep farm together with her sister. She had applied for a subsidy for a wolf-proof fence months prior but never received a response. When we spoke, her unprotected sheep had been attacked a week earlier, costing her considerable amounts of revenue and rattling her confidence in local and national authorities (Fieldnotes, 07 March 2022).

In addition to a lack of trust in their government, the return of the wolf to the Netherlands also seems to have increased the agricultural sector's distrust of environmentalists, thereby reinforcing the perceived gap between nature protection and agriculture (Fieldnotes, 16 February 2022). According to Drenthen (2021), conflicts between humans and 'wild' animals are in most cases conflicts between humans. This became clear to me when I talked to Eva about her trust in environmentalists. She explains she sees "[...] the wolf as a successful lobby by ecologists and NGOs in European [...] and Dutch contexts" (Interview, 16 February 2022). To which, Bram, a spokesperson for NowolvesBenelux, adds: "There is a very explicit game being played by ecologists. [...] they do everything from the wolf's point of view, sacrificing the interests of cattle farmers and of the countryside to the wolf in that respect" (Interview, 16 February 2022). Statements such as those made by Eva and Bram attempt to maintain interspecies power relations. Simultaneously, they indicate that the state of protection of the wolf is felt as an added burden. A burden that is, according to them, not recognised by authorities and environmentalists, fuelling their lack of trust.

## Interrogating power relations in the (South-West) Veluwe – Concluding remarks

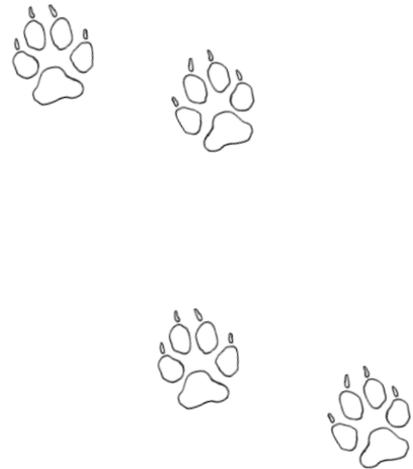
From the 1950s onwards, agriculture changed considerably under the dominant narrative of economic growth and progress – a wolf in sheep’s clothing. The sector was industrialised, intensified, and expanded, despite its polluting and exploitative consequences. The concept of the Plantationocene relates destructive transformations of human-maintained farms, fields, and forests into extractive and enclosed plantations, to capitalistic and political practices of exploitation where humans and other-than-humans are turned into resources (Tsing 2015, 19). Alongside this, years of increasing human manipulation over nature shaped social imaginaries about the wolf’s belonging. As a result, power relations become tangible in the Veluwe’s current industrial structures of agriculture, in which both other-than-humans and humans have become entrenched (Buizer, Arts, and Westerink 2016). Environmental measures, such as the protected status of the wolf, represent perceived additional disadvantages for today’s industrial farmers. Many farmers indicated they do not feel represented by their government or ecologists who advocate for wolves. Moreover, a layered thinking can be detected in the Veluwe, an area that has always been under manipulation, and is surrounded by agriculture. Its nature reserves are not seen as actual wild nature, and therefore not perceived to be a suitable ecosystem for an animal like the wolf to roam freely. Yet the wolf is here and continues to cross over dividing lines, whether imagined or visible, such as fences.

Image 5. Ecoduct fenced-off  
Photographer: Eelke Lenstra



Wolves confront us with the limits of what we are currently doing. Wolves confront us with current world problems. They do not care about the agreements that have been made by us, they go right through our made-up boundaries, and they force us to start a conversation again and to re-evaluate; who are we? why are we doing this? why do we actually want such industrial sheep farming in the Netherlands? They force us to reopen the debate, look around us and consider ‘what do we really think is important’.

[Maurice La Haye, ecologist, interview, 23 March 2022]



### 3. Wolves and fences

This chapter is dedicated to the story of wolves and their journey across the Veluwe. It builds upon previous chapters by focusing on other-than-human materials such as fences, and the traces that all kinds of animals living in the Veluwe leave along them. Thus, it becomes tangible how other-than-human animals tend to challenge human imposed boundaries and demarcations between nature-culture or wild-domestic (Drenthen 2015). In an attempt to understand wolves in the Veluwe, I first consider them within their relational contexts. Here, Haraway's (2008) becoming-with offers a methodological starting point for a discussion about wolves that goes beyond interspecies power relations.

Furthermore, in observations of people in the South-West Veluwe, like hunters or foresters, engaging with wolves in their daily activities suggest that caution should be exercised in drawing general conclusions about the species, and that wolves should rather be considered within the assemblages they are part of. Here, I do not intend to ascribe human-like characteristics to them. Wolves do not have to resemble humans to be counted for, but their traits do say something about how they shape the assemblage of the Veluwe, and in turn, how the assemblage shapes wolves (Wolf and Weissing 2012). Second, I examine fences as human-imposed boundaries to protect (capitalist) assets. Wolves, demonstrating the ability to cross these barriers, appear to defy the translation of other-than-human nature into wealth through alienation or scalability. This chapter concludes by discussing how alienation and scalability, essential features of the Plantationocene, are being challenged by wolves within the fences of the Hoge Veluwe National Park and industrial sheep farms.

#### Becoming-with wolves

By acknowledging the relational contexts in which wolves operate, it is made evident that 'becoming' is always 'becoming-with' (Haraway 2008, 244). Replacing the logic of human exceptionalism opens the doors to the worlds of other actors and makes accessible what matters to other-than-human species (Haraway 2016, 57). As such, becoming-with disentangles existing hegemonies and stresses the importance of our co-existing in a relational world (Haraway 2008, 2016). I apply this view by looking at how wolves become-with in relation to the landscape, other wolves, and human actors within their assemblages (Haraway 2008).

Traveling from sheepfold, to farm, to forester's cabin, I was not the only one crossing the landscape of the Veluwe. These landscapes were concurrently the areas where wolves were searching for territory, food, or a mate to start a family with. I happened to be there during the mating season. Both females and males examine each other's droppings, urine and prints as they travel long distances to find a suitable partner. When two wolves eventually come to meet, they already know quite a bit about each other, though a serious testing phase follows. A joint hunt, for example, allows them to get to know each other in action and cooperation. If they choose to then continue, they will generally spend a lifetime together (Posthumus 2019). But before starting a family, the new couple first needs a suitable territory.

Wolves seem to be able to adapt to landscapes organised and dominated by humans, such as the Veluwe (Wolven in Nederland 2015). Several participants in this research referred to wolves as opportunists, alluding to their intelligence (Fieldnotes, February-April). The varied landscape of the South-West Veluwe, with its forest edges, offers cover and prey. There is, therefore, little reason for wolves to travel far to hunt for sheep or encounter other unprotected or vulnerable cattle along the way (Henry, interview, 03 March 2022). Several foresters, like Henry, followed the pair of wolves that settled in the South-West Veluwe by tracing tracks and using wildlife cameras. He notes that "there is no point in shooting wolves and certainly not one of a pair or pack. The pair that had settled in this area no longer preyed on sheep. But when the female was hit by a car, the male started killing sheep again before he was shot" (Henry, interview, 03 March 2022). Henry's observations show that wolves on their own have been found to come out from the cover of the forest more often to attack domesticated cattle (Jansman et al. 2021, 17).

Moreover, as social beings, wolves have different roles within the context of their pack (Posthumus 2019). When puppies are born, the parents feed, educate, and protect them. Doing so requires not only strength to defend their territory, but also being resourceful, caring, and cooperative (Packard 2010). That wolves possess these traits is supported by research conducted by Rachel Dale and her colleagues (2017) on the ability of wolves to cooperate. They found that wolves cooperate significantly better than dogs, and are more tolerant when sharing a carcass, ensuring each pack member is nourished. In addition, wolves support each other in raising and protecting the little ones in the pack, including those who are not their own. Mutual empathy seems to be a condition for a united and powerful pack. Bekoff (2002) argues the empathic wolf, therefore, is a 'successful' wolf. However, being empathic, intelligent, or social are not general characteristics that can be attributed to all wolves as prerequisites for survival. Wolves can also be dominant, playful, or short-tempered, to name but a few traits

(Posthumus 2019). Yet, these are all still human projections placed onto wolves, which calls for an awareness and reflectiveness here of the fact that human discourse and interpretation has its limits, meaning we are unable to completely grasp a wolf's world. Therefore, a continually inquisitive, curious and at the same time reserved mindset is essential if colonial practices such as 'speaking for' are to be limited as much as possible (Haraway 2016: 126-28; Kirksey 2010: 562).

Making assertions about wolves requires the understanding that none of them follow the exact same life trajectory or share the same genes (Bolnick et al. 2003). Actors are shaped in a semiotic, relational web of encounters (Haraway 2016; Tsing 2015). How wolves 'become-with' depends on the interplay between opportunity, temperament, and experience (Haraway 2008; Posthumus 2019, 142). In turn, attempts to predict whether all wolves are afraid of humans or whether they regard sheep as their main source of food are less appropriate. It might be more accurate to approach wolves as the actors in the relational contexts in which they are found and to avoid stereotyping and rigid categorisations. Categories are unstable and therefore subject to change, consequently placing importance on tracing the assemblage of which wolves are part of and watching them emerge within encounters (Tsing 2015, 29). Mark (Interview, 11 March 2022), a forester who closely followed the traces of the pair of wolves that settled in the South-West Veluwe, is conscious of the fact that wolves cannot be generalised:

Look, in May, I will have been dealing with wolves for two years. Two years, that's nothing at all. [...] the most important thing I have learned is that those wolves are all really unique, they all use the landscape in a different way, their routes, even their predation is different, and wolves can decide for themselves what is best for them.

Walking across the sand drifts, Mark points out the places that were characteristic for the wolf couple to him. He did not know the male for very long before he was shot, but Tosca, as he called her, he can tell me more about. By following footprints, markings, and images on wildlife cameras, Mark was able to follow her and become familiar with her characteristics: "that was enough for me to know that she must have been disturbed at the moment she was hit by a car" (Mark, fieldnotes, 11 March 2022). He explains she was hit during the season when red deer drop their antlers and people illegally enter rest areas to find these antlers, selling them or decorating their walls. Mark theorises this must have happened in Tosca's area too. Furthermore, many ecologists, foresters, and wolf experts I spoke to believe that not only poaching, but also roads and cars are among the challenges wolves need to overcome to thrive

in the Veluwe (Jansman et al. 2021, 63). Human-imposed barriers such as fences, however, seem to be less of an obstacle for many wolves in the Netherlands.

### Fenced-off nature

This section turns to fences as boundaries created by humans with the purpose to protect capitalist assets. Based on my observations, I find that fences, within the context of the Plantationocene, support the alienation of other species and scalability of industrial practices (Tsing 2015). However, wolves' ability to cross these fences puts these processes into question, as articulated by forester Henry on one of the occasions I accompanied him on his daily route.

While the early morning sun shines softly upon the forest through which forester Henry and dog Saartje and I are strolling I can almost hear the first plants and trees bursting out of their branches. I don't see Saartje's head, except for the moments she lifts her nose from the ground, stands still like a statue for a few seconds and raises one of her legs, like hunting dogs usually do when they sense something. When Henry and I are making a guess as to what she might be up to, we are briefly interrupted by a Black Woodpecker echoing through the forest from afar. A drum here to mark out a territory, a tap there to signal that it wants to mate, a loud hammer blow to create a nest cavity, who knows. Spring is here, that's for sure. I think about how the planet tirelessly produces new life every spring and, if you are not paying attention, you might just forget for a moment how difficult it might be to be able to do this for all species right now. But when my eyes fall back on forester Henry, and particularly on what is attached onto his waist, I am reminded once again of the current state of affairs. Every day before Henry starts his day, he puts a belt around his waist carrying a pistol, a truncheon, handcuffs, and pepper spray. In the back of his truck, he throws a rifle. The former he carries to protect the forest from humans, the latter to shoot animals suffering from hunger or those entering and causing inconvenience in 'human areas'.

On our way to the spot where Henry recently installed a wildlife camera, we both silently wonder whether it will give us a sign of wolf-life. We walk past various fences that mark the division between the forest - where wild animals are allowed- and the farmland - where they are not. When I get a little closer, I notice that there has been a lot of digging along the fences. Henry explains that these are from wild boar. Due to their large numbers and the resulting food shortage – they have long not known a natural enemy like the wolf - they attempt to create a passage to the green and rich grass, characteristic of many farmlands. Sometimes

they succeed, but mostly they end up rooting endlessly along a fence until they collapse, or if Henry encounters them before, they are shot.

Henry (Fieldnotes, 30 March 2022) would much rather not see any more fences in the area, but, as he repeated several times during our walk, "it just depends on what we want economically." He goes on to explain that we want everything in this country, "but we especially want to be very rich, so we want to control at all costs what makes us rich." I ask Henry what he thinks about all this control that people want. Suddenly, he stops walking and points to the left. Following his finger, I observe a patch of heathland in a small opening in the woods. In a rather sharp tone he asks me: "Is this nature? The heath? Is this natural?" (Henry, fieldnotes, 30 March 2022). Still a bit thrown off guard by his unexpected response to my question, I try to gather some words and stammer "um, yes, that depends on how you define nature. I think heathland was created by..." Henry (Fieldnotes, 30 March 2022) then interrupts me and says: "no, heathland is the biggest cultural landscape in the Netherlands. We shape nature to our liking in the Netherlands. We have no wild nature."

I am slightly relieved because this is an expression, I have heard so often that I have almost lost track of it. As a result, I have become accustomed to responding to it, I in a way. I regain my composure and ask him how the wolf fits into this idea. As we continue our route, Henry (Fieldnotes, 30 March 2022) explains that wolves decide for themselves what they do: "Because they climb over fences, they take what they want to eat, and they sit where they want to sit. That's what makes them so elusive."

Wolves' ability to be less 'controllable', as indicated by forester Henry, is how they have come to challenge imaginaries of nature and human-made barriers. This uncontrollability ultimately puts human economic interests at risk. The fence serves as a materialised boundary between where animals are imagined to belong, and where they are not (Drenthen 2021). By their efforts, all kinds of animals such as deer and wild boar try to break through the boundaries out of hunger, as Henry explained. However, their success rate is still limited, allowing humans to remain in relative control. Wolves, on the other hand, seem to have less difficulties in overcoming these boundaries as they move through areas defined as unsuitable for them, including the Hoge Veluwe National Park (De Hoge Veluwe National Park 2019).

There are divergent stories about how two wolves managed to enter the (supposedly) 'hermetically' sealed Hoge Veluwe National Park (Rijksoverheid 2022). The fact remains, however, that these wolves made their way into a park known for its Mouflon sheep population. The park often came up in discussion, mainly to serve as an illustration of human dominance driven by economic interests. Participants living around the park believed that the underlying

reason for “hermetically” closing off a nature reserve (Simon, interview, 24 February 2022), and thus rejecting the return of the wolf, is the desire to preserve the park's cultural history and, above all, to secure its economic interests.

Running his finger over a large map of the area, forester Henry, helped me visualise the maze of all the different landowners in the area. He pointed to the border of the Hoge Veluwe and the *ecoduct* (a bridge enabling animals to cross roads) that was built a few years ago to connect the park with the other areas. This *ecoduct*, however, was fenced off by the park almost immediately afterwards. When I ask him why, he shrugs his shoulders and, with a telling smile, responds “[...] because deer and their imported Mouflon sheep from here [the park], went to here [outside the park], and for them, these animals are their business model” (Fieldnotes, 22 February 2022). In fact, by referring to the inability of animals to enter and leave the park, Henry compares the park to a zoo. In doing so, he points to the economic interests that underpin decisions about (the classification of) nature, such as the protection of farmland or closed parks with admissions providing 'culture', including museums, hunting and leisure facilities.

Henry experiences the negative consequences of closed off areas on a daily basis when he has to shoot starving animals for instance. He expresses his preference for the disappearance of fences and turning the Veluwe into an open area, “If that park would open up, animals could go back and forth, and you have a flow of fresh blood and that is good” (Fieldnotes 22 February 2022). However, this way of thinking is not shared by everyone when considering closed nature reserves. By looking at the Hoge Veluwe National Park, Hein (2011) argues for the economic benefit that is generated through the protection of forest ecosystems. He estimates that the park contributes around €2000.00/ha/year (or €10.80million/year) to surrounding areas, over three times higher than the per hectare value of neighbouring agricultural areas. However, it is only as a fenced off park that the Hoge Veluwe is able to earn as much as it does. In fact, 80% of its revenues stem from entrance fees, allowing the park to become profitable while ignoring any associated negative externalities (Hein 2011). A closed off environment restricts the freedom of movement necessary in maintaining diverse and healthy living populations (Jansman 2021). Assessing the park's value solely through its economic interests reinforces inherent human-centric thinking and subsequently neglects interspecies entanglements and wellbeing in and around the park (Patel and Moore, 29). Meanwhile, less confined to barriers wolves are turning this view on its head as they have made their way into the enclosed park.

By reclaiming their position within the Veluwe ecosystem and entering the park, wolves now have access to prey animals, like the Mouflon, that have been removed through human intervention from their original habitat. This is a landscape unfamiliar to them, and for which

they have not evolved to survive in (Maurice La Haye, ecologist, interview, 23 March 2022). As a result, the Hoge Veluwe's cultural icon, and subsequently the park's business model, are jeopardised (Arts, Fischer, and Van der Wal 2012). Based on different ethnographic accounts by participants in this research, the following vignette is an imagined description of a wolf's hunt approached through the perspective of the landscape. It considers the vulnerability of the Mouflon, as an alienated species, in a foreign landscape.

A large flock of Mouflons emerges from the forest. Panic is what seems to coordinate them. Suddenly, one of them strays from rest. An opportunity arises. A wolf, pushing it a little harder, follows the sheep as it drifts away from the rest. After a short sprint the little horned sheep turns its head back. In this moment, it is used to looking back at the wolf as it left the predator at the bottom of the steep, jagged slope, typical of the Corsican landscape it comes from. Except for the fact the park has no steep slopes. The Mouflon does not stand a chance in this landscape.

Unlike the wolf, the Mouflon is not a native species. For hunting purposes, it was imported in the 18th century from the mountainous environments of Corsica and Sardinia (Zoogdiervereniging n.d.). In the characteristically flat Netherlands, however, these sheep are at a disadvantage when pursued by an animal, like the wolf, that has been long adapted to this landscape. By removing them from their own ecology, the sheep have now become a feast of defenceless prey for wolves (Herzog 2018).

The case of the Mouflon in the Hoge Veluwe National Park exemplifies how wolves put alienation, as a feature of the Plantationocene, under pressure. According to Tsing (2017, 59), the principle behind the Plantationocene is the alienation and detachment of organisms by removing them from their life-worlds without regard for multispecies living arrangements. In this respect, I consider the Hoge Veluwe National Park a kind of enclosed plantation in which these sheep were stripped of applicable ecological partners such as mountains. The survival of the Mouflon within the park, now under threat of wolves, serves as an illustrative example of how they challenge the foundations of the Plantationocene.

Another plantation currently challenged by wolves is that of industrial husbandry, in particular the conditions for the scalability of sheep farming. Ecologist Hugh Jansman (05 April 2022) points this out in an interview:

I think the wolf is a symbol for something: where it hurts us in society is where it reveals the system's flaws. What that means is that how we currently manage our cattle farming in the Netherlands, taking sheep farming as an example, doesn't make sense. There is zero duty of

care. Most sheep are kicked behind a wire and are checked on once a week. Keeping so many sheep is only possible because it is extensive labour and is encouraged by the fact there is hardly any margin.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is hardly feasible for industrial farmers to apply the available wolf-proofing measures, such as herd guard dogs and electric fences, due to the scalable nature of the business. What Hugh points to is that wolves undermine the scalability of sheep farming. In doing so, they test the scalability of other-than-human nature: a condition inherent to the Plantationocene (Tsing 2015, 132). This may be supported by the notion that several sheep farmers have either already given up farming or claim they will do so soon (NOS 2022b).

### Breaking out of the Plantationocene – Concluding remarks

Fences - acting as a materialised boundary between dualistic human imaginaries of nature-culture and wild-domestic - are challenged in the Veluwe by the wolves that cross them. Nevertheless, some careful consideration should be given to categorising or stereotyping wolves since, as highlighted through Haraway (2016), wolves grow up and live in a relational world and are continuously subject to change. Attempts to make general predictions about the species therefore lack a foundation. Nevertheless, wolves have demonstrated an ability to enter areas such as industrial farming lands, jeopardising capitalistic interests. They thereby, seem to be undermine certain conditions of the Plantationocene, including alienation and scalability (Tsing 2015). As such, wolves may lead the way in breaking out of the Plantationocene. In returning to a damaged landscape, wolves draw our attention to alternative ways of co-existing. Hence, the last chapter is devoted to sheep, dogs and shepherds, and their collaborative work on the Veluwe heath.



Image 6. Sheep in sheepfold  
Photographer: Eelke Lenstra



You are studying anthropology, right? Yes, I think culture... I see it as an obstacle to the development of nature. We have ruined it by sticking to it and now we need a holistic view to make it better. That is why the wolf is important, because it is also part of the whole package. The ecosystem is holistic too, we all need each other.



[Bas, shepherd, 12 April 2022]



## 4. Collaborative work in shepherding

The previous chapter discussed how the presence of wolves in the (South-West) Veluwe put pressure on current hegemonic structures. However, to linger in polarised debates do not help us to think about what it takes to survive collaboratively (Haraway 2015; Tsing 2015; 2018). Therefore, this final chapter highlights the work of shepherding, and the hopeful insights they can provide us with.

“Fweet, fweet, fweet, come on guys, this way!” Shepherd Simon’s high-pitched call seems understood by a drifting small group of sheep who then join the others, bleating softly, lambs following closely. *But where did Sam go, wasn't he just here?* When I ask Simon where the dog is, leaning on his shepherd's stick attentively looking towards a point in the distance unknown to me. He responds, “oh, he's here somewhere, don't worry, he knows exactly what he is doing, he has so many years of experience” (Fieldnotes, 21 April 2022). I suddenly spot Sam, hidden behind heather bushes and the tall purple moor-grass, watching towards the same point with the same level of attention as Simon. His paws are bent, his head is low, as if he could start a sprint at any moment. Before I can ask Simon why Sam has suddenly moved there, he says “one second, I have to check if that dog on the loose is not going to cause any trouble” (Fieldnotes, 21 April 2022). *Ah, so that's what they saw. Much earlier than I did.* When the free-leash dog passes by without posing a clear threat to the sheep and lambs, both Simon and Sam relax.

Honestly, these are the greatest danger for us, unleashed dogs and the accompanying two-legged animal that doesn't care about the signs that say dogs must be kept on a leash in this area. The wolf is a real softie in this respect, ha-ha. People always ask us if we are not 'bothered' by wolves. Do you hear that? 'bothered', they assume that domesticated animals can't live with wild animals. But look, aren't we the living proof? (Simon, fieldnotes, 21 April 2022).

I am tempted to describe the Veluwe heath with its sheep, dogs, and shepherds using terms of beauty, order, and serenity - as landscapes are often portrayed - in which the shepherd, like an orchestra conductor, guides his flock to the right beat with the smallest of cues. However, terms like trouble, mess, and disorder may be better suited. In any case, shepherds and dogs have to be attentive on the heath, with the lurking possibility of dog attacks, and recently: wolf attacks. Nevertheless, the latter does not seem to bother most shepherds. In fact, they seem to incorporate wolves in their own daily existence, and the assemblage they are part of. In contrast

to fences serving capitalist assets, shepherds use fences differently, with other underlying motives. This makes their work together with wolves, sheep, and dogs possible. In effect, many shepherds currently working the Veluwe heath do not only regard the wolf as an animal to be wary of, but also as their ally. Their collaboration, amidst the capitalist ruin of the Veluwe, is vital to the renewed flourishing of many species, or in Simon's (Fieldnotes, 21 April 2022) words, "to make things messy again." It is these small-scale activities, which enables them to do so, while sabotaging the Plantationocene's foundation (Tsing 2015, 42). Indeed, shepherding, with the aim of restoring biodiversity to the heathland, does not appear to be a source of capitalist accumulation through scalability.

To paint a more vivid picture of how shepherding works, I first discuss the everyday activities of shepherds, sheep, and dogs in the Veluwe heathlands. In doing so, I describe how they have adapted to the return of wolves, and how particularly the small-scale nature of the work enables them to do so. Second, I explore shepherds' social imaginaries, underlying a willingness to share the landscape with wolves. This reveals that most shepherds I spoke to, through their own experiences, imagine the world around them as built by many species, including wolves. Or, in Haraway's (2016, 32) formulation, they think in tentacular ways. In doing so, I extend Taylor's (2002) concept of social imaginaries to include other-than-humans. However, this does not imply that I approach shepherding merely as an idealistic solution. Hegemonic and capitalist dynamics remain entwined in the activity. Nonetheless, it can help us in the necessary reappraisal of multispecies - human and other-than-human - working our damaged landscapes and creating worlds in which we all thrive (Haraway 2016, 60). Finally, working across species differences - wolves, sheep, dogs, and shepherds deconstruct wild-domestic dichotomies. This leads me to Tsing's (2018) concept of domestication-as-rewilding, a paradox at first glance, but one that is made logical when considering shepherding.

### Deconstructing scalability through shepherding

In this section, I argue how shepherds with whom I have spent time on the Veluwe heath, challenge scalability through deconstructing hegemonies and dichotomies between human and other-than-human worlds. Here, sheep no longer merely serve as resources for human purposes, as they are bred for the purpose of nature conservation instead of (over)consumption (Haraway 2016; Swanson, Lien, and Ween 2018; Tsing 2016; 2018). Scalability and ongoing expansion aimed at obtaining profit, is replaced by smallness of scale as an important principle guiding

their work in making the heath ‘messy’ again, that is, an area in which many species can thrive again; “where non-scalable ecological [...] relations erupt” (Tsing 2015, 42).

As explained in chapter two, sheep have always played an important role in manipulating the Veluwe landscape. In fact, they created the Veluwe heathland together with farmers who, through their methods, caused an impoverishment of the soil (Elbersen et al. 2003, 17-18). Impoverishment is not necessarily the same as reduction, as this impoverished soil provided a home to a multitude of species (Diemont et al. 2013). By roaming the Veluwe again, sheep graze the grasses that have taken over the heathland because of industry, providing space for those species to return. Shepherd Carmen (Interview, 11 April 2022), a woman who feels more at home in the outdoors with her sheep than anywhere else, explains:

It is a cultural landscape, the heathland, something that was created by the way they used to herd the flocks. But there should also be many other species living in these areas, and the sheep can now help biodiversity by grazing variably and on a small scale. Grazing leaves little tufts behind, which is good for insects, so it is precisely this irregularity that is important. Sheep also act as ‘taxis’ because seeds and insects hitch a ride in their wool and between their legs. This creates more biotopes for different animals that have been driven out by nitrogen, such as the sand lizard that lives in a clearing or the nightjar that is now starting to return.

When she was younger, Carmen had a career in the Arts in mind, but after a few years, she discovered she preferred working with animals over working with humans. In her own words, they “are much more real” (Interview, 11 April 2022). Now out with her sheep every day, she enjoys it to the fullest: “This to me, is the most animal-friendly way of working with animals. I don’t have to exploit them, we work together,” she tells me while opening the gate to let the sheep out onto the heath. By engaging in such relationships with her sheep, Carmen, among most shepherds with whom I have spent time on the Veluwe heath, seem to want to move away from the idea that sheep serve as mere sources of profit. Instead, sheep are framed as companions in their restorative work of heathland ecology (Donati 2019, 127). In doing so, they appear to reevaluate the hegemonic structures between human and other-than-humans characteristic of industrial sheep farming in the Plantationocene (Tsing 2015).

When the lambing season is over - around the first quarter of each year - the sheep, dogs and shepherds leave their *kooi* (shed) each morning to slowly stroll across the heathland. By grazing the heath, they reduce overgrown grasses. Before nightfall they return to their night accommodation, usually one of the *kralen*, a piece of fenced-in space for the sheep to stay the

night, found across the heathland. Recently, these fences around the sheep were upgraded by shepherds. In fulfilling their role in the ecosystem, the reappearance of wolves in the Veluwe makes the area even “messier” (Simon, fieldnotes, 21 April 2022). This called for a change in Veluwe shepherding, however. From the moment shepherds learned wolves arrived in the area, they not only replaced fences but also adapted their everyday activities and herd composition. The fences have been heightened and charged with electricity, checked on every day. To ensure the fences stay charged, shepherds check for holes and cut the grass that grows against the wire around the fence. Sometimes this is done by volunteers, and protecting the sheep becomes a team effort (Fieldnotes, 11 April 2022). Hence co-existing with wolves, while continuing shepherding, entails laborious work. Efficiency, a prerequisite for scalable projects serving the competitive market (Peck and Tickell 2002, 394; Tsing 2015, 82), is certainly not what characterises shepherding. However, as these laborious practices do not translate to industrial sheep farmers today (Fieldnotes, 16 February 2022), it is precisely this non-scalability that allows for their co-existence with wolves and the continuing of their mutually important work for the recovery of the Veluwe.

Another measure that allows anticipation of possible predation of sheep by wolves, due to small-scale shepherding, is an adjustment of the group composition. Border Collies are often used by shepherds to guide the flock. While the dogs characterise the image of shepherds in recent years, they do not seem to offer sheep enough protection. After all, before the wolf arrived, dogs were mainly expected to “drive rather than guard” (Bas, fieldnotes, 12 April 2022). Gradually, shepherds seem to establish working relationships with other types of dogs: herding guard dogs, larger and heavier in size. To shepherd Bas (Interview, 12 April 2022), who has worked with this type of dog for a year now, it is clear that the wolf challenges cultural and economic interests:

Herd guard dogs used to be here when the wolf was still around. But when the wolf was chased away, these other dogs [Border Collies] were brought here for tourism, as a driving dog. Yes, it's a beautiful dog, because you can do nice things with them, you can whistle, you can do all kinds of things. That was very important for the tourists because we could earn money with it. And that is going to work against us now, with the arrival of the wolf.

Bas refers to a time of shepherding when the profession existed only in a few places in the Netherlands for cultural-historical reasons, without the threat of large predators (Woestenburg 2018, 1048). However, now that efforts emerge to conserve nature through shepherding,

objectives of tourism and nature conservation conflict. Like the situation of Mouflon sheep in the Hoge Veluwe National Park, the participation of Border Collies in the Veluwe assemblage, for human entertainment purposes, is being put under pressure by wolves. Hereby, wolves challenge people to go beyond the inherently human interest of tourism. Moreover, adapting to the demands of living with wolves by reintroducing herd guard dogs again seems to depend on scale. As noted in the previous chapter, in a context of large-scale production, it is not feasible for sheep farmers to guard flocks with this type of dog. The scale at which shepherding takes place, by contrast, is.

However, to (be able to) anticipate for the wolf's presence and act accordingly, shepherds are less dependent on capitalist forces than industrial sheep farmers due to the fixed incomes they receive from their partner organisations. This influx of money replaces the main purpose of production solely for economic profit and allows shepherds to give priority to the welfare of other-than-human nature (Fieldnotes, 30 March 2022). However, it is important to address temporality, as shepherding today is not fully separated from capitalist and global market forces. Shepherd Simon (Fieldnotes, 21 April 2022) points out that sheep become capitalist inventory and part of an (international) commodity chain once they have fulfilled their duties on the heath. Although sheep in the heathlands live much longer on average than sheep in an industrial environment, they will still be slaughtered for the world export market (Simon, fieldnotes, 21 April 2022). This also applies to male lambs slaughtered, in most cases, after only a year of life (Carmen, interview, 11 April 2022). Even sheep wool will be sold either locally or internationally after sheering (Simon, fieldnotes, 21 April 2022). Nevertheless, the fact that herds are only temporarily tied to capitalist forces leads shepherds, sheep, dogs and wolves to share the same landscape. The stable income shepherds receive from their affiliated organisations, enables them to invest in wolf-proof measures and work on a small-scale, without having their livelihoods threatened by wolves. In turn, this allows shepherds to pay attention to the multispecies world around them. It seems this is something that many of them hold dear, as is reflected in the way they imagine their environments.

### Exploring collaboration in shepherds' imaginaries

Often without intention, many people tend to overlook the multispecies worlds around us (Tsing 2015, 281). Shepherding, however, can exemplify the curiosity necessary for an appreciation of the co-existence with wolves, among many other-than-human beings. Having enough money and time helps, though these are not the only facilitators to curiosity. This

section reveals that underlying imaginaries of shepherds are significant too. These imaginaries are shaped by their everyday experiences on the heath, noticing multispecies entanglements. In analysing shepherds' imaginaries, I therefore extend Taylor's (2002) concept of social imaginaries, centred on humans alone, to a multispecies understanding. As shepherd Simon (Interview, 24 February 2022) puts it: "I am of course a nature person at heart. Otherwise, you don't become a shepherd."

Similar reasons were cited by others for becoming shepherds, as well as for their willingness to adapt to live and work alongside wolves. No shepherd I spoke to thinks that wolves will transform the Veluwe back into the biodiverse state it was before "the bubble of progress" (Tsing 2015, 18). Yet instead of opting for ease and comfort, most shepherds look beyond empty promises of alienation, for they see in the wolf an ecological partner within the assemblage they share. In their endeavours, shepherds bring the patience and attention to entangle with wolves, among other species, without knowing exactly where their world is going (Tsing 2015, 263). Shepherd Carmen (Interview, 11 April 2022) is also prepared to give up some convenience for wolves:

It really does make things more thrilling. It certainly does. But we messed it up by avoiding exactly that, and now we must look beyond those fears. We must think along with nature. We simply cannot survive without each other. So, if a wolf came back here, he should be allowed to be here.

The notion that species (re)construct landscapes through interacting activities, and that life on Earth persists because of such combined efforts (Haraway 2016; Ingold 2000; Kohn 2013; Latour 2018; Tsing 2017), is at the heart of Carmen's argument. Carmen takes the ecosystem as a guiding principle in her thinking; she thinks, as Haraway (2016, 32) would conceptualise, in tentacular ways. Most shepherds seem to be breaking away from hegemonic dynamics, reflected in imagining sheep and dogs as partners, not property. Accordingly, they do not perceive that the animals accompanying their journeys in the Veluwe are 'stolen', but serve as prey to wolves, just as much as deer or boar.

However, I also encountered a few shepherds, like Koen, who indicated that they personally are not enthusiastic about the return of wolves. I visited Koen once at the sheepfold where he has been working for 10 years. He explained to me that wolves have made things more difficult now. His arguments included the safety of the sheep and the extra work it entails. He made me aware of the fact that the organisations to which shepherds belong sometimes

expect them to communicate that wolves are welcome, regardless of their views (Interview, 29 March 2022). In addition, some indicated that they already operate within a field of tension and have to resist dominant ideas about human entertainment versus the welfare of nature or the sheep. The public function of the shepherd sometimes adds pressure, for example, from disrespectful approaches of tourists, dogs attacking the herd, and vandalism. This pressure, according to some shepherds, has only increased after COVID-19 measures. As a result, shepherds sometimes have little room for the additional efforts, such as maintaining fences, necessary to protect their heard from wolves (Fieldnotes, 03 April 2022).

Nonetheless, most shepherds I spoke with, imagine life on this planet as inherently inter-connected. This appears to underpin their willingness to relinquish some control and comfort in order to live in the same area as wolves. Shepherds move through an environment every day, guided by the work of many entangled human and other-than-human species. As such, their imaginaries are shaped by the experience that it is a multi-species effort to build and maintain this world. For example, some shepherds pointed out a gentian flower to me during our walks across the heathlands, others told me about the last appearance of a green tiger beetle where he or she had been with a flock (Fieldnotes, 18 April 2022). Their curiosity drives them to notice the interconnectedness of the area. They see and experience that shepherding has an impact on other species, which enables them to trace multispecies entanglements (Haraway 2016; Tsing 2015, 22). Hence, in analysing shepherds' social imaginaries it appears that other-than-human nature plays an important role that goes beyond Taylor's conceptualisation of society (Adams et al. 2015, 17). Informed by what shepherds notice on the heathlands, normative expectations are created towards themselves and others as to how one should behave. In other words, shepherds' social imaginary of non-hegemonic multispecies worlding seems to shape and be shaped by other-than-human nature (Haraway 2016, 60). As such, their imaginaries are also less determined by binary distinctions, such as wild-domestic. Rather, they are imagined as intertwined and potentially synergetic.

### Deconstructing binaries through domestication-as-rewilding

This section draws on Tsing's (2018) concept of domestication-as-rewilding to argue why shepherding deconstructs dichotomies of wild-domestic and nature-culture. As shown in previous chapters, these dichotomies underpin the arguments against the presence of wolves in the Veluwe. In deconstructing dichotomies, disturbance presents itself as a central element. Disturbance does not mean damage in this context, but rather, being active on a small scale on

the heath and making it liveable again. This type of disturbance - like the work of shepherds, sheep, and dogs - benefits other species and the process of rewilding (Reice 2003; Tsing 2015, 161; 2018). Rewilding is a process where conditions are created to restore an area to its previous, complex, and heterogenous state (Perino et al. 2019). However, they are not the only ones, disturbing the Veluwe as outlined by Bas while we approach the flock.

Carrying two large bowls of food, I spot two animals, distinct from the white wool due to their larger size, brown spotted fur, and wagging tails. We seem to delight the big friendly guard dogs with the slimy substance we shove in front of their noses. I turn my attention to the surroundings again. The *kraal* in which we are standing is connected to the forest by a piece of grassland. I ask Bas if he ever sees any animals coming out of the forest, and he nods in agreement:

Sometimes I have 30 red deer standing here. They eat the vegetation, and I don't begrudge them [...], that's not the point. But to be able to keep it healthy, yes, what we also do on the heath, [...] I also guide the herd [on the heath] and say, oh wait, don't eat it all, because we have to keep it. Well, the same is important for the deer, but then the wolf does that (Fieldnotes, 22 March 2022).

Shepherd Bas draws an interesting comparison between the work of wolves in relation to deer, and the work that he and the sheep perform on the heath. In doing so, he first challenges the foundation on which anthropocentrism is built, namely, the persistent distinction between humans and animals (Braun 2004, 1352). Second, Bas' view implies that a multispecies approach is inherent to worlding (Haraway 2016, 60). In this, wolves and deer are only two of the many species that have an impact on the (South-West) Veluwe assemblage through their disturbances. This form of domestication can be helpful within the restoration of the Veluwe, namely domestication that works across species. The aim is multispecies collaboration, not alienation or accumulation (Tsing 2018, 246).

As such, shepherding deconstructs wild-domestic binaries. Bas clarifies this by emphasising that the needs of both the sheep and the landscape must be acknowledged. He even refers to sheep as "semi-wild", not by behaviour - as a matter of fact, I have never encountered such calm and affectionate sheep – but because, as Bas (Fieldnotes, 12 April 2022) once told me, “the industry should disappear out of the sheep if the landscape and the sheep are to be readjusted to each other.” As such, within the capitalist ruin of the Veluwe, domestication-as-rewilding becomes apparent (Tsing 2018).

Working the landscape, making the damaged grounds liveable again, wolves, deer, sheep, dogs, and shepherds, among many other related species roaming the same space, domesticate each other. This is not a hegemonic domestication aimed at turning other-than-human nature into resources for profit, as is characteristic of the Plantationocene (Tsing 2015, 51). Rather, it is the collaborative efforts of numerous species, each disturbing the landscape - or each other - also known as domestication, that initiate the process of multispecies resurgence that is, rewilding (Tsing 2018, 248-249). Here, disturbance, human or other-than-human, feeds heterogeneity (Reice 2003; Tsing 2015, 161). Similarly, shepherd Simon (Interview, 21 April 2022) notes that “heathlands need a bit of a bashing, [they] need to be tinkered with a bit.” To which he adds the desire, shared by all other shepherds I spoke too, to further extend this disturbance:

We should burn it, but [heathland] managers just cannot seem to get that into their heads. But you have to let the [fire] run all the way over it and you can only do that in the autumn, when all the amphibians have gone, the frogs, the little snakes, the lizards, a little towards the winter and no further into the winter, then it has to run over it. That piece of knowledge is important, that is very old knowledge.

This is a view consistent with other ecological and anthropological work claiming that such human disturbances favour biodiversity (Mayer 2006; Scott 2011; Tsing 2015, 200). The knowledge Bas refers to, and which is supported by academic work, thus gives even more reason not to place humans outside of nature. Significantly, to ensure disturbances are constructive, shepherds think “along with nature” as Carmen (Interview, 11 April 2022) nicely put it, to identify with the ecosystem and engage in tentacular thinking (Haraway 2016). By discouraging human exceptionalism, shepherds appear willing to team up with wolves. This is supported by their belief in the fact that the work of wolves is just as important in working the Veluwe as that of sheep, dogs, and themselves.

### Rebuilding a multispecies landscape – Concluding remarks

Shepherding, as opposed to industrial sheep farming, is an activity in which wolf-proof fencing appears to be realistic due to its small-scale nature. This enables them to continue their work on the heath while roaming the same area as wolves. Rooted in their lived experiences on the heath, shepherds’ social imaginaries play an important role in co-existence. They are shaped by the belief that it takes a multispecies effort to make the heathlands liveable again, and that

wolves are one of the actors with whom they share that effort. However, I do not wish to suggest that the current practice of shepherding in the Veluwe is the perfect example of how to relate to other species. Shepherding in the Veluwe, through the slaughtering of sheep and the selling of wool, is not entirely detached of exploitative capitalist dynamics. Nonetheless, their ties to market forces are temporary and are not the dominant factor guiding their work. As such, through domestication-as-rewilding, shepherds constructively transform the heath and undermine the idea that wild and domestic are separate from each other (Tsing 2018). In shepherding, all organisms - wolves and humans included - are working to rebuild the damaged area through their intersectional disturbances. Ultimately, one might draw inspiration out of the collaborative co-existence of wolves, shepherds, sheep, and dogs.



Image 7. Forest near Ede  
Photographer: Eelke Lenstra

## Conclusion - Towards co-existence beyond capitalism

Wolves' willingness to return to the (South-West) Veluwe after hundred-fifty years offers an opportunity to explore an area in ruin. Therefore, through a multispecies ethnography, this thesis followed wolves within the multispecies assemblage of the (South-West) Veluwe and explored how they inform and shape social imaginaries. Analysing this assemblage through the concept of the Plantationocene allowed the area to be evaluated as a capitalist ruin, marked by decades of human manipulation and exploitation. Accordingly, capitalist narratives of growth and progress shaped social imaginaries of nature rooted in nature-culture binaries. This thesis depicted how these binaries lay at the heart of where wolves are imagined to belong. By crossing human-made lines, however, wolves have set in motion anticipatory dynamics among human and other-than-human actors within the Veluwe assemblage. These dynamics range from different group behaviours among deer, to sheep farmers pressured to scale-down their business. Based on these considerations, I have found that wolves challenge conditions of the Plantationocene (Tsing 2015), as they threaten capitalist accumulation, alienation, and scalability of industrial farming practices. The other side of the coin is that the return of wolves has exposed forms of life that may inspire us. With some species joining forces with wolves in ecologically restoring the damaged area – shepherds, sheep, and dogs – we can envision co-existence within the capitalist ruin of the (South-West) Veluwe through Tsing's (2018) domestication-as-rewilding.

To support these arguments, this thesis examined the history of human dominance over and manipulation of the Veluwe landscape. Through the concept of salvage accumulation, I discussed how capitalist forces increasingly took hold of the Veluwe and turned other-than-human nature into resources for human wealth (Tsing 2015, 63). Human and other-than-human power relations, accordingly, led today's Veluwe to be imagined as lacking real, wild, nature. Wolves, fitting within the wild imaginary, are therefore seen as out of place in the Veluwe. This binary is maintained to protect capitalist assets (Drenthen 2015). Wolves thus seem to have returned to a field of tension shaped, on the one hand, by the idea that progress is a human only affair that needs protection (Tsing 2015), and on the other, by the notion that life requires a multispecies effort that goes beyond crops, cattle, and pets (Jansman 2021; Haraway 2016). Transcending this contradiction, many of my participants shared the belief that wolves have little or no direct significant impact on ecological restoration. The environment is considered too fragmented, manipulated, and damaged to allow that, with economic gain taking precedence in its design.

Addressing this thesis' research question, I found wolves' ability to move through the landscape's human-made boundaries to (re)construct multispecies assemblages. In doing so, they have informed and challenged socio-environmental imaginaries among human stakeholders in the South-West Veluwe in three different ways.

First, sharing territory with wolves requires a certain degree of control loss. As a result, wolves have urged human actors within the Veluwe assemblage to reflect on how they currently relate to their environment. This has caused the meaning given to nature, and as consequence humans' stance towards it, to be reconsidered.

Second, this thesis has revealed how wolves undermine scalability and alienation as a foundation of the Plantationocene (Tsing 2015). This has not gone unnoticed within the Veluwe assemblage. The Mouflon, as an example, an alienated species, is unable to compete with the wolf in the Hoge Veluwe National Park's landscape. Furthermore, the scalability of sheep farming is put into question by the fact that, on an industrial scale, sheep remain an accessible unprotected prey for wolves.

Finally, sharing the South-West Veluwe assemblage with wolves calls for more viable ways of multispecies living. Although the region is seen as a human-dominated landscape, a view often presented as an argument for keeping wolves at bay, the activity of shepherding demonstrates the opposite. In doing so, this research contributed to anthropology's nature-culture debate by looking into co-existence between wolves, shepherds, sheep, and dogs that deconstructs binary thinking. In analysing their collaborative work through the concept of domestication-as-rewilding, this thesis has highlighted how wolves, shepherds, sheep, and dogs' small-scale disturbances within the Veluwe assemblage contribute to reviving the damaged landscape. As such, the Veluwe heathland is turning into a site where human and other-than-human relationships have a chance to flourish again. Shepherds do not aim to achieve completed gardens; they instead work on continuously evolving heathlands, and adapt to opportunities for disturbance on a small, non-expanding scale. Indeed, should they have the tendency to expand, wolves will keep them in check.

## Final Notes

The arguments made in this thesis are based on the fact that wolves have a protected status as a species. The thesis' conclusions, hence, are limited to this current situation. Indeed, protection is a condition ultimately attributed to other-than-human species by humans. The moment wolves' lose this status, they might be unable to challenge notions of

scalability for example, and humans could, in turn, choose to reinforce nature-culture binaries from a position of power. This requires us to reflect further upon the hegemonic position humans occupy. Another point to consider is the role of infrastructure, such as the roads that cross the Veluwe. From my fieldwork, infrastructure emerged as a significant danger to the lives of wolves in the region. Unfortunately, there was no room to explore this aspect within the scope of this research. For future studies on wolves, I therefore suggest exploring this controversial topic, which has already been the focus of much debate within Anthropology (see for example Larking 2013; Howe 2018), and to discover how following wolves through their assemblages could lead us to rethink narratives of progress.

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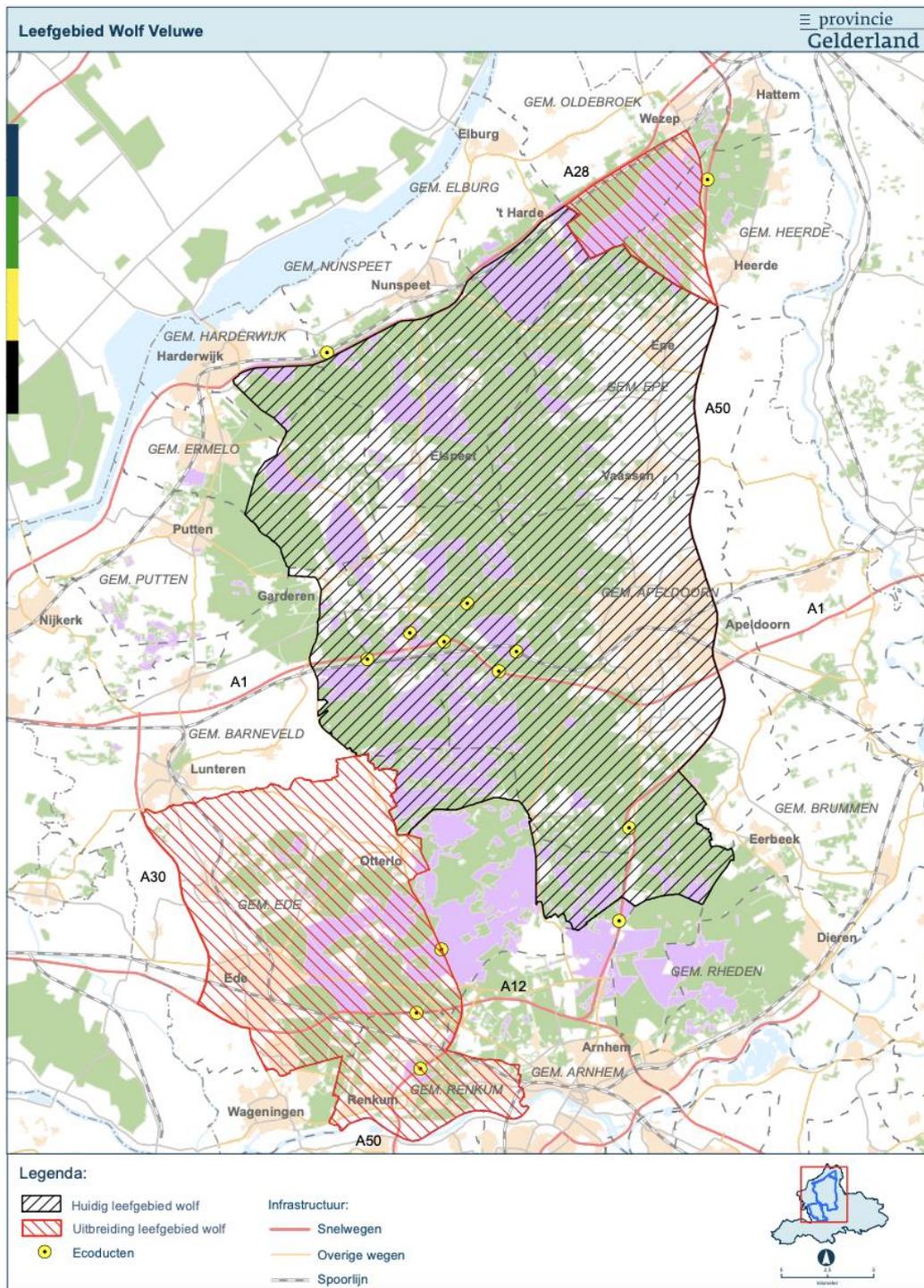
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# Appendix

## APPENDIX 1 - Habitat wolf Veluwe



Red striped South-West Veluwe (expansion area)

Black striped Habitat wolf

Credit: <https://www.bij12.nl/onderwerpen/faunazaken/diersoorten/wolf/>