

keeping the wilderness

● Third year Ed student, Robert Guest meets the Gateway's Gary Bigg

"Kaila heard and he said, 'My work is good. I shall tell Amarak (the spirit of the Wolf) and he shall tell his children, and they will eat the sick and the weak and the small caribou, so that, the land will be left for the fat and the good ones.' And this is what happened and this is why the caribou and the wolf are one; for the caribou feeds the wolf, but it is the wolf who keeps the caribou strong.

Ootek's Tale from Farley Mowat's *Never Cry Wolf*

Sporting facial foliage not unlike his mentor Farley Mowat, artist/conservationist Bob Guest comes on like a sincere, compassionate (yet realistic) human being. One more cynical than I might be tempted to group that particular genus with the much-maligned wolf and place them both at the top of the endangered species list.

At 34, Robert Charles Guest can look back on an interest in nature and the preservation of wilderness spanning thirty years (by his own admission). During the interstice, he has graduated from the Alberta College of Art in College, become a fellow in the Alberta Society of Artists, and partaken of a founding membership in the Alberta Art Foundation, an organization presently engaged in purchasing Alberta artwork under an annual grant from the provincial government. Now enrolled in education, Bob is still active in conservation affairs, notably in the defense of wolves, the setting aside of wilderness reserves, and the highly controversial debate over firearms legislation.

His most rabid enthusiasm is voiced in the defence of wolves, for which he and four associates founded the Canadian Wolf Defenders in February of 1968, and which now numbers in the thousands. Their Manifesto reads:

The main objective

A society dedicated to conservation and understanding toward one of Canada's most magnificent wild animals, the wolf. These are specific objectives:

1. To educate the public and change the old wolf image.
2. To seek government protection for endangered species.
3. To abolish the use of bounties and poisons for wildlife.
4. To outlaw hunting wolves from aircraft and snow vehicles.
5. To restrict the casual carrying of firearms.

Canadian Wolf Defenders is a recognized natural history society. It is a non-profit organization set up to develop interest and understanding for the wolf and its smaller cousin, the coyote. While we praise the good work of other conservation societies, we believe it is

necessary to specialize. For what animal is traditionally more "dangerous" than a wolf? In too many places the hand of man has already demonstrated a kind of superiority which has exterminated the wolf, the wild variety of "man's best friend".

It is our duty to search out facts about wolves that will generate interest. We would like to give nature lovers a new angle to consider. Too often predators are thought to be something against nature. We hope more people will see the wolf as a part of our natural environment and will take a stand for his future.

"Wildlife is the essence of any wilderness setting. Where there is real wilderness there are wolves. The two go well together."

Bob is naturally concerned with the fate of the Kakwa Falls region, south-west of Grande Prairie. In anticipating of the outcome of the development of the area by logging and oil companies, the first conservation society in the Peace River bloc (in Alberta) was inaugurated in the spring of 1971. Dubbed Wild Kakwa, the organization is determined to have the region set aside as a wilderness park. As a founder of the movement, Bob has specific ideas as to what should and should not be done in such areas:

"From time to time we hear suggestions that a wilderness area should be used for hunting. In fact it is encouraged in some cases, perhaps in an attempt to raise support for saving what is left of our unspoiled country. While the idea of hunting in a wilderness area sounds okay in theory, it would create some problems. The following points should be considered:

1. One of the basic needs of a wilderness area is to provide sanctuary for the remnants of our wildlife population. Wildlife is the essence of any natural

Wild



setting and unless certain species are protected they face extinction possibly within a few years. Hunting in the same areas can interrupt the ecological balance which has existed for a long time.

2. Hunting automatically creates discrimination against any species of wildlife which appears to compete with Man — especially natural predators. Animals such as grizzly bears, coyotes, cougar, lynx, and timber wolves help to maintain a state of healthy equilibrium between the game herds and prey species. Remember—these animals have rights, too. Let's save some of their country for them.

3. In the natural state we hardly ever hear of over-population or over-grazing. If a natural area is not enclosed by a fence, surplus wildlife usually leaves the more populated regions and spreads out into the surrounding country. Where natural predators are preserved, hunting is not required to "harvest" the extra animals.

4. People, too, like a retreat away from the calculated dangers of each hunting season. The person who prefers to hunt with a camera should have just as much right to be there as the one who carries a rifle. Many people like to mountain climb, go on hikes, canoe or study natural phenomena without taking risks and being in conflict with hunters.

5. Quite often hunting initiates human greed and competition. A wilderness area where hunting is allowed will likely end up as a glorified game pasture — something like those of western Europe. Obviously, the hunters who have the means economically or the right "connections" would have more favourable access to the area.

6. Hunting in a wilderness area involves a question of privileges. For example, if someone has the right to remove wildlife from a reserve area, then someone else should have the same right to dig up trees, set traps, transplant wild flowers, collect rocks and rob birds' nests for egg collections. Imagine what would happen to the wilderness concept!

7. Since hunters have vast areas of the Province to call their own, especially during each hunting season, I fail to see why they should be allowed within the boundaries of a wilderness reserve. Unfortunately, even outside these areas many careless hunters make a bad name for the rest. Besides, we will all have to make sacrifices if certain areas are to be saved.

8. On the question of economics, evidently the amount of money brought into the country by hunters is usually matched by that of visitors who wish to camp, take photographs, and generally enjoy the outdoor atmosphere. There are indications that more people prefer to observe wildlife than to destroy it,

especially in eastern Canada. Quite often, the cost of good photographic equipment more than equals that of hunting gear.

Not content to rest on his laurels, Bob's current endeavours center around the firearms crisis. A true lover of controversy, his attacks take the form of persuasion as opposed to destructive criticism. In a brief sent to several ministers in the provincial government, he outlines the problem and suggested solutions:

"It is obvious that guns are in the hands of too many irresponsible people. Each year increasing numbers of hunters and others go into the forest and outlying areas and there are practically no limitations on who is allowed to carry a gun. As soon as possible legislation should be passed that would restrict the casual carrying of firearms. Otherwise we can expect:

- Increased danger to humans
- Increased loss of native wildlife
- Increased damage to property and livestock
- Increased vandalism and damage to the environment."

Suggested solutions

The hunting season would be clearly defined and game regulations should be condensed and simplified so almost anyone could understand them. This is not the case at the present time.

A person who carries a gun should have:

- a regular hunting licence after passing an examination or,
- a special permit due to unusual circumstances.

Hunter training should be compulsory and should emphasize two main categories:

- the safe handling of firearms and,
- the correct identification of legal game compared with other species.

All hunters should pass an approved examination and all non-residents should be accompanied by qualified guides when hunting in this country.

To gain respect for the law, penalties should be a lot stiffer. For most infractions fines might be sufficient. But for serious vandalism, imprisonment would be justified and equipment should automatically be confiscated.

New regulations in regard to firearms should be publicized. To help set an example for the public convictions should also be publicized like they are in any other kind of crime.

Public education should be encouraged at different levels. Organizations such as the *Canadian Nature Federation* or the *Canadian Wildlife Service* should be consulted for recommendations rather than relying on local policy which can be biased.

More effective wilderness areas or parks should be established:

- as real wildlife sanctuaries where hunting would not be allowed,
- as areas for enjoyment and outdoor recreation,
- as areas of unspoiled environment for study purposes."

As yet the government is cautious in introducing legislation on such a volatile issue, but Bob is optimistic. He says there are encouraging signs.

Like many of his contemporaries, his faith in education as a force in social change is coupled with a desire to eat. Be that as it may, he feels that children must be made aware of the interrelationships between man and the environment. His future plans? "To produce worthwhile artwork, in particular, pen drawings that will reflect the beauty of the unspoiled environment."

