

Reviews and short notices

WOLVES IN IRELAND: A NATURAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY. By Kieran Hickey. Pp 155.
Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2011. €29.95.

A book on the wolf in Ireland is very much welcome at a time when debates concerning the management of large carnivores across the European Union, and their possible and highly controversial reintroduction into Britain and Ireland are flash points for conservationists, ecologists, politicians, farmers, hunters and a host of popular commentators. Hickey's book offers a contemporary blend of natural and cultural history, drawing together a range of evidence to demonstrate the significance of wolves – both negative and positive – in past Irish societies, as well as a discussion of the thorny issue of reintroduction. A stated major aim of the book is the reconstruction of Irish wolf biogeography, which is clearly brought out in the detailed emphasis placed on lupine demographics. Hickey's academic background is predominantly in the study of climate and weather systems, although over the last decade he has also published several articles on the Irish wolf, culminating in this book. *Wolves in Ireland* is sub-divided thematically; the first half, which consists of a discussion of the archaeological evidence of lupine presence, a chapter on names, followed by a survey of mythology, folklore and superstitions, appears to be arranged in a somewhat eclectic fashion. This structure is perhaps inspired by the style of Harting's (1880) seminal work on the wolf in Britain and Ireland, which Hickey cites as a major source for his own book, alongside James Fairley's *Irish wild mammals* (1992).

The first part of the book opens with a discussion of archaeological material, largely concerned with the prehistoric colonisation of Ireland. A range of sites and details of some of the remains are cited, along with the problems inherent in differentiating between wolves and dogs on the basis of fragmentary skeletal morphology. Following on from this, Hickey continues the theme of enduring antagonism between humans and wolves with a string of unsubstantiated claims that wolves in the Late Bronze Age were a menace to sheep in the winter, that Iron Age ring forts were built as defences against wolves, and even that a major reason for constructing lake dwellings and stockade ring forts was for protection against wolves (p. 27). Later medieval castle bawns (i.e. fortified enclosures) are added to this list within a somewhat eclectic survey of enclosing livestock. A relatively more detailed discussion is focused on toponyms and personal names with lupine elements, although this survey is largely descriptive and as Hickey states, not comprehensive, with little to compare it to Ayes and Yalden's (2008) projection of wolf biogeography in England before the Norman Conquest, which is cited. Furthermore, explanation is focused on nomenclature, and no attempt is made to provide a chronological or cultural context for the place names, or for the personal names. Personal names, which may in fact be related to place names and land ownership, are added on after this along with heraldry, although none of these fascinating sets of data are integrated or taken further. In the following chapter which assembles information under the umbrella of 'mythology, folklore and superstitions', the unusual association between saints and wolves that is particularly distinct in Ireland, as well as the use of the wolf as a diabolical symbol, is surveyed but not discussed in any detail. The final section is concerned with werewolves, and the Irish material – which is extremely interesting – is situated within rather broad and generic summaries of the phenomenon from elsewhere in Europe and

concluded with some traditional medical explanations such as lycanthropy and hypertrichosis.

The second part of the book is devoted to a more systematic and detailed consideration of wolf presence from the early medieval period up to the documented death of the last wolf in 1786. This section contains an abundance of information on references to the wolf and in particular shepherding and hunting edicts, with some interesting trends highlighted, although Hickey does not move beyond a descriptive summary to contextualise the significance of the Irish material. The breakdown of wolf records for each decade in the later time periods, as well as Hickey's spatial analysis, is particularly informative. Here, wolf presence is linked with upland and wooded terrain, as well as a viable prey population. There seems to be some confusion regarding modelling depredations and how modern ecological data may be used to inform predator–prey dynamics in the past. Hickey states that wolves targeted cattle and sheep when humans introduced them to Ireland, *instead* of wild prey, whilst in the next sentence he goes on to say that an important role for the wolf was to control grazers, especially deer and wild boar, and continues with alternating statements about depredations on wild ungulates and livestock (pp 98–9). Regarding wolf attacks on humans, the discussion consists of a brief summary of some of the better known documented case studies from around the world. Hickey cites Grambo and Cox's (2005) dismissal of wolf depredations on humans, instead of the more systematic survey by Linnell *et al.* (2002) which suggested that historically attested attacks in European regions took place under specific social and ecological circumstances. Whilst the data Hickey presents is extremely useful for understanding responses to wolves in the early modern period, the chapter on wolf biogeography ends without any detailed remarks moving beyond the description of the identified trends.

The discussion of documented wolf presence and the modelling of wolf biogeography are clearly the highlights of Hickey's book, but they both fall short of more detailed analysis and contextualisation. They are followed by a discussion of the decline and extinction of the species and summing up the debate for reintroduction in a concluding 'final comments'. The suggestion of the Irish wolf as a distinct sub-species is intriguing and could be tested with detailed genetic studies of extant archaeological remains, as Hickey suggests. The link between reintroduction and habitat could have been clarified – indeed it is a recurring theme throughout the book – insofar as *canis lupus* is known to adapt to any environment providing there are viable and diverse prey populations, and it is the distribution of these prey populations that ultimately provides an ecological backdrop for wolf biogeography. In regions with high biodiversity wolves are closely associated with wilderness because of the habitat preferences of their prey, although there are plenty of historically documented and modern examples of wolves entering up to, or even into, urban areas. This reflects both lupine mobility and the complex dynamics of predation. Indeed, Hickey states in his discussion of seventeenth-century wolf biogeography that 'the documentary evidence also shows that wolves were regularly found in cultivated areas', without any further discussion of this significant observation or its temporal context (p. 91). Wild ungulates certainly favour a variety of woodland types, and whilst Hickey refers to the modern rising Irish deer population, he predicts the impact of wolf predation would be limited. He then goes on to cite the Norwegian and more recent Swedish wolf culls, as a necessary means of control. Without picking at the details, the discussion of reintroduction is not particularly cohesive. The number of deer in Ireland could certainly sustain a wolf population, but public attitudes would invariably represent the most significant obstacle, with the 'battle for hearts and minds' characterising all major discussions of large carnivore management and especially the issue of reintroduction. The ingrained fear of wolves needs to be addressed as a vital part of this process (e.g. Linnell *et al.*, 2003). The added section on the ownership of wolves and wolf/dog hybrids serves to underline the complexity of modern public perceptions of wildlife, but then the book ends rather abruptly.

Overall, Hickey's *Wolves in Ireland* is an interesting idea and contains some useful information, but it is poorly structured and its ideas lack integration and

contextualisation. Its narrative is punctuated with anecdotal bagatelles, which are individually interesting but contribute to the diffuse feel of the book as a whole. With its stunning colour photographs of wolves (although the black and white figures are for the most part poorly reproduced), the book is aimed more at a general readership, and as a compendium of information it is certain to attract widespread interest. Whilst it frustratingly falls short of significantly furthering our understanding of the rise and fall of the Irish wolf population in the past, it will hopefully provide inspiration for more detailed and integrated studies.

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A EUROPEAN FRONTIER ELITE: THE NOBILITY OF THE ENGLISH PALE IN TUDOR IRELAND, 1496–1566. By Gerald Power. Pp 215. Hannover: Wehrhahn Verlag. 2012. €29.50.

The period of intensified English conquest in Ireland over the Tudor period saw the medieval colonial community transformed. Newly arriving administrators, soldiers, servitors and settlers heralded increasingly aggressive policies of militarised conquest. The arrival of this increasingly powerful New English colonial grouping, particularly prominent in the Elizabethan period, heralded the decline of the Old English colonial community, identified as such to distinguish these descendants of the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman conquest from the newly-arriving colonial class. Often blamed for the medieval conquest's failures, the Old English found themselves displaced from influential administrative, conciliar, judicial and military positions. Struggling against their deteriorating status, many insisted upon their loyalty, even as they engaged in opposition that sometimes led to their imprisonment, as happened when a number of the Old English resisted Sir Henry Sidney's economic policies in the late 1570s, though a few would enter into open rebellion, as James Eustace, Viscount Baltinglass, did in 1580. Not surprisingly, given Old English experience in the Elizabethan period, attention to this community has tended to focus either on the later Tudor period or on individual magnates, such as the earls of Kildare and Ormond. Gerald Power here offers a ground-breaking study of the lesser Old English nobility of the Pale in the early Tudor period, providing essential background to their decline.

Power's study is premised on two critical and, as he argues, intertwined assertions: firstly, the fundamental importance of the nobility as a lens through which to consider developing Tudor imperialism in Ireland as well as the developing Tudor state, no less than the fundamental importance of the nobility as a lens through which to appreciate European developments in this period more broadly. His first chapter therefore provides a helpful comparative overview of the nobility in Poland, the Netherlands and Scotland which demonstrates that Ireland was not unique in witnessing noble–state tension in a period of rapid change across Europe. In Ireland, however, the desire to secure and extend colonial control provided the specific context for state–noble tension. Application of the nobility as a lens through which to view developments comes into play as Power masterfully contextualises the experience of the lesser Old English nobility in the early Tudor period within many of the major milestones familiar to students and scholars, such as the Kildare Rebellion or vacillation between policies of conciliation and conquest in its aftermath. Importantly, Power's consideration of these events by expanding on Old English experience and involvement in them adds substantially to our understanding of this period.

The second premise central to Power's assessment of the early Tudor lesser nobility of the Pale is his assertion of their function as service nobility. This function was the basis for identity and thus critically, Power argues, their importance to the state. This was