

Authorities Convinced Five-year-old Killed by Wolves

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By: *Gerald McNebl*

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QUEBEC (CP) — Game experts are generally sceptical about stories of wolves, attacking humans, but there is strong evidence to support belief that five-year-old Marc Leblond was killed by one Sept. 24 north of Baie-Comeau, Que. An autopsy showed he was killed by a savage animal and authorities at Baie-Comeau, 225 miles northeast of here, are convinced it was a wolf.

If so, it would be the first authenticated case in Canada of a wolf killing a human. Even reports of wolves attacking humans are rare. Dr. Louis Lemieux, director of Quebec's fish and wildlife management service, can recall only one — that of a man who reported fighting off a wolf in Northern Ontario several years ago. Of the death of Marc Leblond, he says "it could happen" that a wolf killed him, but if so it would be as unusual as the case at Sept-Hes, Que., last year in which an airman was savagely attacked by an owl.

Shoot On Sight

Police and hunters at Baie-Comeau are shooting wolves on sight, though few have been seen near inhabited areas. The Leblonds, from Godbout, Que., had rented a summer cottage for a week at an isolated lake north of Baie-Comeau. It was about 25 miles from the Manicouagan hydro-electric development where Mr. Leblond worked. He commuted each day on an access road. Workers have often seen wolves near the road.

Frank Auger, Quebec-Hydro police chief at Baie-Comeau, says Marc and his three-year-old brother had been outside playing for a few minutes Sept. 24 when their parents heard a commotion. The younger boy rushed screaming into the house. The parents unable to find Marc, thought he had drowned and called police.

A search of the lake revealed nothing, but two policemen and foreman Leon Verrault of Quebec-Hydro found the torn body in the forest after a brief search.

Tracks Near Body

They also saw a wolf lurking 50 yards off. Unarmed, they were unable to shoot it but Verrault, an experienced hunter, described it as "a grey timber wolf weighing about 80 pounds."

Tracks of two wolves surrounded the body. Later that day an armed group scoured the area, shot at a

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wolf but missed. Examination by Dr. Jacques Beaumont, the district coroner, convinced Auger the boy was killed by a wolf. Wolves follow the same pattern in killing deer. Auger says there are no wild dogs, in the area and there were no signs of other animals near the body. He says Manicouagan workers workers have r e p o r t e d being watched by wolves – “They threw stones at them but the wolves didn’t go away” – along the access road. There had never been a report of an attack however.

Bounties Halted

“We’ve seen all kinds of them in this, district but this is the first time in 20 years of police work I’ve had a case like this,” Auger said.

Yet he is convinced the Leblond boy was killed by a wolf and he has ordered his men to kill them on sight. Quebec quit giving bounties for wolves in 1961 and now sends professional trappers into areas where they are killing cattle or s h e e p . A trapper hasn’t been sent to Baie-Comeau.

There evidently are thousands of wolves – the largest on record 136 pound – north of the St. Lawrence but Dr. Lemieux says they are rarely seen even by hunters.