

Man Raised by Wolves Is Disappointed with Life Among Humans

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Marcos Rodríguez Pantoja lived among wolves for 12 years in the mountains of Spain's Cordoba province, before being discovered by the Civil Guard at age 19 and brought back into civilization. But even now, at age 72, Pantoja still hasn't completely adjusted to life among humans.



Born in Añora, Cordoba, in 1946, Marcos Rodríguez Pantoja lost his mother when he was only three years old, and soon after, his father abandoned him to live with another woman in a neighboring town. As a young boy, he was taken to the mountains to replace an old shepherd and look after a herd of 300 sheep. He remembers that the old man taught him to make a fire and use various tools, but in 1954, when Marcos hadn't even turned eight years old, the shepherd died, leaving him all alone.

It's not clear how Marcos wound up living with wild wolves in the mountains, but when the Civil Guard found him, 12 years later, he had already replaced spoken words with animal-like grunts. He was brought back to civilization, but he never really adjusted to life among humans. At one point, he even tried going back to the wolves, but "it wasn't the same anymore", the wolves no longer saw him as a brother.

"You can tell that they are right there, you hear them panting, it gives you goosebumps ... but it's not that easy to see them," Marcos recently told El País. "There are wolves and if I call out to them they are going to respond, but they are not going to approach me. I smell like people, I wear cologne."

Marcos says that his last happy memories date back to his life among the wolves, to the female that showed him motherly love for the first time in his life, and her cubs that accepted him as a brother. They taught him how to survive in the wild, showed him which berries and mushrooms were safe to eat, and which were poisonous. He remembers sleeping in caves, among bats, snakes and deer, and running barefoot on rough terrain without a care in the world.

"I only wrapped my feet up when they hurt because of the snow," he remembers. "I had such big calluses on my feet that kicking a rock was like kicking a ball."

But those happy times ended when the Civil Guard found and caught him 53 years ago, and his life fell apart. He talks about being cheated and abused by his fellow man, exploited by bosses in the hospitality and construction business, and laughed at by his peers because he doesn't know much about things like soccer and politics.

Marcos currently lives in the village of Rante, in the Galician province of Ourense. This past winter has been hard for him, as he couldn't afford to buy heating equipment on his small pension. Luckily, members of the environmental group Amig@s das Arbores are raising money to insulate his house and buy him a pellet boiler for next winter.

Despite his overall disappointment with life among humans, Marcos Rodríguez Pantoja is happy that at least some of his neighbors accept him as "one of them." He also loves talking to kids about his love for animals and the importance of protecting the environment, and Amig@s das Arbores often invite him to talk at schools in his areas. Children are apparently the humans whom Rodríguez feels most comfortable with.

"It's amazing how he enralls the children with his life experience," forest officer Xosé Santos, a member of Amig@s das Arbores, said.

Marcos Rodríguez Pantoja is one of the very few recorded cases of humans raised by animals, away from civilization. He has been the subject of various anthropological studies, books and documentaries. (662 words)

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