

THE VOICE OF NATURE



Project Report by

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Introduction

Denmark needs more nature.

Across the country, private foundations, wealthy individuals, municipalities, and the government are working to transform areas, release large animals, remove drainage systems, and let the forest spread.

In many places, this is going really well. But the changes also create conflicts when wild horses, cows, bisons, and oxen are released, mountain bike trails and horse paths are affected, or when space must be made for both wolves and people.

After reading through hundreds of articles about Molslaboratoriet, speaking with biologists and national park managers, and examining Danes' attitudes toward rewilding, it has dawned on me that a large part of the challenge facing nature is about communication - not least the coverage by the Danish media.

I've thought a lot about how I can write about the media's coverage of these nature projects without turning it into media bashing. Each individual report and article may very well be perfectly ordinary news that lives up to the classic journalistic virtues.

But taken as a whole, something has happened that skews the picture. I ask myself whether we, as journalists, have a bias simply because we're part of a Danish population that has (almost) no nature and therefore finds it difficult to understand what nature is.

Is this distortion simply due to the media's penchant for drama and conflict? Or is it because we don't understand what it will take to save species and expand Danish nature?

Transforming the Danish landscapes is incredibly difficult. It's an enormous and complicated task that's also fraught with emotion. The new view of nature - on animals, fields, meadows, and forests - that rewilding requires strikes at the very core of our identity.

Through my project, I aim to illustrate how the media covers this area of conflict, discuss what this might mean, and suggest how we, as media professionals, can create the best possible foundation for discussing nature without contributing to the intensification of conflicts or fostering polarization.

I have therefore interviewed four experts in the field of nature about how they perceive media coverage of nature and the projects they are working on. You can read about that below. I have also read and analyzed a wide range of selected articles about Molslaboratoriet, one of the major nature projects in Denmark, to uncover what media coverage actually looks like. That is what I will describe next. Finally, I will discuss the conclusions I have reached, the questions I

have found to be missing, and how solutions and constructive journalism can be incorporated into the media's coverage of nature as a subject area.

Background

As a country, together with the EU and 196 other countries, we signed the Kunming-Montreal Framework Agreement in 2022 under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (Rio, 1992), which stipulates that at least 30 percent of the world's land areas, as well as freshwater and marine areas, must be conserved and protected by 2030.

At least 30 percent of degraded ecosystems must be restored, and we must work to prevent species extinction. We have made this commitment.

In addition, there are political agreements. As part of the green tripartite agreement, a large majority of the Danish Parliament at the time decided in 2024 that 20 percent of Denmark's land area must be protected nature by 2030.

This target may be expanded, as the 2026 government platform sets a goal of 30 percent protected nature, with 10 percent of that area to be strictly protected.

A majority also supports the creation of 21 Nature National Parks, where space will be set aside for nature with a high degree of biodiversity.

This should not be confused with the National Parks, which extend across - but do not own - large areas that include cities, roads, agriculture, culture, and nature. For example, the town of Ebeltoft, fields, farms, hiking trails, roads - and Molslaboratoriet - are all located within Mols Bjerge National Park.

Depending on whom you ask, there is either a long or an incredibly long way to go to reach that goal. Denmark has reported to the EU that 14.8 percent of its land area consists of protected natural habitats. According to the Danish Biodiversity Council, the government's independent advisor on biodiversity, only 2.3 percent of the country's natural areas are protected (according to the council's 2023 report).

The complexity of this issue is underscored by the fact that a long-promised and planned biodiversity law was never fully negotiated before Mette Frederiksen called an election in February 2026 and the SVM government became a thing of the past.

Meanwhile, species are struggling more and more, even in areas where they are supposed to be protected.

The Danish Environmental Protection Agency reports that over the past 40 years, we have lost approximately three million birds in Denmark's open countryside. About 10 percent of our butterfly species have gone extinct since 1950.

Fact Box: What Does “National Park” Mean?

National Parks: Do not own land but operate through voluntary agreements with private landowners, the Danish Nature Agency (the state), and municipalities. Managed by an independent national park foundation. Aim to strengthen nature, landscapes, and cultural-historical sites, as well as support research, outdoor recreation, and public outreach.

Nature National Parks (NNP): The state owns the land. Nature is allowed to develop on its own; no agriculture is practiced, and forests are set aside as untouched forests. Large grazing animals are introduced to ensure a diverse natural environment . (21 NNPs are to be established; the first opened on June 21, 2025, in Fussingø near Randers).

Danish Nature Parks: A certification program for large natural areas. Operated by the Danish Outdoor Council.

The Molslaboratoriet: The Molslaboratoriet was originally a natural science field laboratory established in 1941 in Mols Bjerger National Park on Djursland. The Natural History Museum Aarhus received the area as a gift from Ellen Dahl, Karen Blixen’s sister. Horses and cattle have grazed there since 2016. The area was taken over by the Hempel Foundation on April 15, 2026.

Sources: danmarksnationalparker.dk and Vildmarken.dk

Voices from the field

Introduction and Summary

When I called four sources employed by nature foundations, NGOs, and National Parks, I already had a sense that in some parts of Denmark there are many conflicts surrounding nature projects. And that these conflicts also shape media coverage.

But what is the perspective of the experts who are also familiar with the aspects of nature conservation work that may not make it into the media spotlight? How do they perceive media coverage, what consequences does it have, and what do they feel is missing?

I interviewed Else Østergaard Andersen, director of Thy National Park; Morten DD Hansen, a biologist, nature interpreter, and former employee at Molslaboratoriet; Anders Horsten, nature policy advisor at the Danish Society for Nature Conservation; and Catrine Grønberg Jensen, director of Danmarks Naturfond, about this.

In practice, their work with nature takes quite different forms. Else relies on a high level of volunteer participation among those who are providing land for more nature; Morten DD spends most of his time on outreach. Anders works on nature policy, and Catrine manages both a foundation and a vast area, Skovsgaard on Langeland, where rewilding is underway.

You can read the four interviews in full on the following pages. But in summary, despite their differences, there are a number of recurring themes in the way they describe the media coverage of their work. These elements can be summarized under the headings of *conflict*; *social media and clickbait*; *bias and unfairness*; *“the little guy against the system” thinking*; *an outdated view of nature*; and *backlash and fear*.

All four feel that the majority of media outlets seek out and exaggerate *conflicts* in the field of nature conservation. They wish more media outlets would focus on the substance - on the technical expertise required to restore nature.

Catrine Grønberg Jensen speaks of a local press that seems *biased and unfair*. Anders Horsten does not go that far, but he describes media coverage as inaccurate and conflict-oriented. Both Catrine Grønberg Jensen and Else Østergaard Andersen feel there is a high degree of *clickbait* and media outlets that source their stories from *social media*.

In Thy National Park, a shift has occurred over time; in 2009, when Else Østergaard Andersen took the job, the press was predominantly constructive, writing in a balanced manner and supporting changes in the area. Now, as she puts it, the newspapers have “*virtually collapsed*,” and coverage has shifted to focus more on conflicts.

Many articles are characterized by a strong “*the little guy against the system*” mentality and a lack of knowledge about nature or an *outdated view of nature*, according to both Anders Horsten and Morten DD Hansen.

All four sources are convinced that media coverage - along with social media - is leading to *setbacks* and slowing down rewilding efforts across Denmark. This is both because municipalities and other decision-makers *fear* the backlash, and because, for the same reason, livestock owners are stopping keeping animals that could be used for year-round grazing.

And all four would like to see media coverage that fosters a deeper understanding of nature and how Danes coexist with it.

As Anders Horsten says:

In modern nature restoration, we base our efforts on scientific knowledge and evidence, just as we base healthcare decisions on health research. After all, we would never accept treating people in hospitals based on 40-year-old knowledge if we’ve since learned more.

In the same way, we must not cling to old paradigms and dogmas when it comes to nature. Because it doesn’t work.

Interview: Else Østergaard Andersen - biologist and director of Thy National Park

As director of Thy National Park, Else Østergaard Andersen needs to be highly skilled in diplomacy, because a National Park like this is a major collaborative project in which a large portion of the land is owned by private landowners. She even refers to herself as both a *fundraiser* and a *“friendraiser.”*

I ask her how she perceives the media coverage:

When I moved here in 2009 from Lolland-Falster, I experienced very constructive coverage of the project from local media, including TV MidtVest - which also covers Thy - as well as Nordjyske and Thisted Dagblad, which later merged. They had a completely different journalistic approach than what I’d experienced where I came from.

Instead of talking the area down and reinforcing a “peripheral” narrative, Thisted Dagblad was good at highlighting the positives and generating interest in what was happening. I actually believe that without that coverage, I don’t know if we would have had a National Park. We have the oldest National Park here because this is where agreement was first reached. And it wasn’t because everyone agreed right from the start.

We saw a lot of negative narratives suddenly turn into something positive - something that has also attracted tourists and new residents and brought life to the towns.

Thy National Park is operated through the voluntary donation and sale of land, and this has had a significant impact on the area’s reputation. Many people in our local community have been proud contributors to Thy National Park.

We have a group of 250 volunteers who welcome guests, keep an eye on the area, and help maintain it, ensuring that the trail systems work and much more.

They encounter various opinions when they’re with friends or family and become a sort of ambassador who can explain what’s happening in the National Park. They also keep their ears open, so we can take action and talk to people - for example, if they’re concerned about animal welfare or other issues.

Else Østergaard Andersen thus notes that this “constructive” coverage has helped make Thy National Park the first Danish National Park. Despite - or perhaps because of - the fact that, in her words, the park is located in an area that many residents of Thy viewed negatively. This was where sand drift ravaged the land and their ancestors had been forced to plant trees as part of forced labor.

Now the media landscape is different. *The newspapers are falling apart up here, and journalists have become few and far between, as she says.*

Much of the debate has shifted to social media. Now I increasingly feel that the media doesn't think there's anything worth reporting on unless there's a conflict.

Now our National Park is easily associated with plans to open a state-run Nature National Park in connection with Thy National Park. And these Nature National Parks have emerged in a conflict-ridden area linked to the deaths of some livestock. The municipal council at the time did not support the initiative.

But Thy National Park also needs large animals that can create the natural disturbances many species depend on. It has become more difficult to get this accepted over the past ten years.

How have you experienced this?

We have 10 horses grazing in the Trøjborghegningen, and that drew negative attention at first, but now people have gotten used to it. It's clear that there's some unease about having animals there, even though you'd think that animals behind fences wouldn't be seen as a problem in an old agricultural landscape like Thy.

There's a certain tone on social media where any talk of nature restoration easily draws comments like, "Here comes some crazy biologist from Copenhagen." Fortunately, I was educated in Aarhus.

It can also cause quite a stir when we plan to cut down some of the many non-native pine trees that the government has planted in the area. But we can usually resolve this by taking a walk with the locals and explaining what the plan is and why.

What stories are missing?

I'd like to see the more fundamental, overarching stories. For example, it might be interesting for other parts of the country to know that we've had success with a volunteer-based National Park here, and that in many ways we've proven the naysayers wrong.

There's also an angle involving the Nature Alliance - namely, that we've joined forces with the two local municipalities, several foundations, and the Danish Nature Agency to create the connected natural areas that everyone says we need. What are the plans for that, you might ask?

Through the Nature Alliance, we've just gained access to another 50 hectares of land, funded by the Danish Nature Fund. The land came from a local whiskey producer who used to grow his barley in these fields. Now his daughters have taken over. They still make whiskey, but have chosen to sell the land as a way to give back to nature and support Thy National Park. This gives us the opportunity to rewild an area that connects several parts of the National Park.

And then, of course, there are all sorts of stories about the experiences out here. When I moved up here nearly 17 years ago, a small area in Thy National Park was the most important

breeding site for cranes in Denmark. But there were so few of them - and since they have a flight distance of one kilometer - very few people got to see them. Now they've spread, and many people get to see these beautiful birds. It's a huge success story. You can read about it in BirdLife Denmark's journal, but otherwise you don't hear much about it.

Interview: Anders Horsten - nature policy advisor at the Danish Society for Nature Conservation (DN) with a special focus on wild nature

As a nature policy advisor, Anders Horsten has a more nationwide perspective on what's happening with nature restoration in Denmark and how it's being covered.

He naturally also holds a position of influence as part of an organization that was involved in the negotiations and the green tripartite agreement, and whose former president, Maria Reumert Gjerding, became a minister in Mette Frederiksen's four-party government in June 2026.

DN - like the Danish Agriculture & Food Council - has two representatives in each of the 23 local green tripartite agreements that are drawing up plans for the transformation of the Danish landscape, giving the Danish Society for Nature Conservation influence.

How does he view media coverage?

I'm seeing a growing interest in keeping up with what's happening with nature, and that's a positive development. More media outlets are following the political work surrounding the Nature National Parks, and in that sense, media coverage of nature is heading in the right direction.

But overall, across the entire media landscape, the resulting picture of nature isn't accurate. It doesn't capture the general public's desire for a better natural environment, and there are many misunderstandings when it comes to what nature conservation efforts mean for animals and biodiversity.

I can certainly understand the media's logic, and that focusing on conflict is part of their reality.

But the result is simply that much of the coverage of conflicts surrounding wilder nature and large herbivores has become a narrative suggesting that we're engaging in organized animal cruelty and subjecting animals to miserable conditions. It becomes very one-sided and misleading.

The media often goes for the "little guy" against the system, and it frequently ends up with stories where some people are upset about the developments on the horizon: the green tripartite agreement, more nature, and the release of animals. "Someone is coming to ruin the countryside," they say. But we know that people are more likely to move to an area when there are forests, water, and opportunities to experience nature.

What's missing from the coverage?

People completely overlook the benefits of allowing animals to live freely. The advantages for their natural lives - which we deprive them of when we confine them and prevent them from

living in herds, as is their nature. They're allowed to mate, follow their instincts, and form social bonds.

We very often find that when opponents of year-round grazing animals appear in the media, the clarifying questions aren't asked. For example: When you say that the animals are suffering, what do you mean by that? How do you view the benefits of living in the herds that they're meant to be in according to their natural instincts?

It's a challenge that almost no media outlets examine the positive aspects for animals that are allowed to live freely in their natural family groups. Instead, everything revolves around fences, human access to areas, and food for the animals.

Of course, mistakes can happen when you launch an ambitious rewilding project with animals and have to manage them in a new way. Those mistakes need to be corrected. And Molslaboratoriet was fined for a GPS collar that was left on a horse for too long, causing it injury. That's one fine in ten years. Despite the fact that these are probably the most closely monitored animals in the entire country.

It surprises me that more media outlets haven't taken a critical stance toward the people who, for several years, have harassed innocent employees, fed animals illegally, and placed a heavy burden on the authorities based on a long, long series of baseless accusations and police reports. These actions are completely out of proportion to what they're fighting for. And they've resulted in many employees having to stop working and suffering from stress.

Why do you think media coverage largely ends up this way?

Even though there's a growing understanding of biodiversity, I think journalists also lack knowledge about what it takes to restore healthy nature. We, as NGOs, also need to do a better job of explaining that.

It often sounds as if we need large animals simply because some people think so. And then a debate arises about whether they belong here.

From a scientific standpoint, the natural processes provided by beavers, the ox, and other animals are indispensable. This is demonstrated by the most robust scientific research available today. And this perspective is missing from many of the articles that focus solely on conflicts.

In modern nature restoration, we base our efforts on scientific knowledge and evidence, just as we base healthcare decisions on health research. After all, we would never accept treating people in hospitals based on 40-year-old knowledge if we've since learned more.

In the same way, we shouldn't cling to old paradigms and dogmas when it comes to nature. Because it doesn't work.

Has what you perceive as biased coverage had political consequences?

Yes, absolutely!

We're hearing from several places that rewilding projects are being scrapped or that people who own animals are pulling out of projects. Or that people are compromising on what they know, professionally, to be good nature management - just to try to avoid conflicts.

Locally, many people are worried about getting in trouble, so they're dropping things or suspending projects.

It's hard to assess just how big a role the media plays, since social media obviously plays a huge role in this.

But it doesn't help if the media uncritically picks up on the stories circulating on social media.

This has political consequences, because the perception that rewilding is bad for the animals makes people feel insecure and afraid of the backlash that might follow. It would be really good if media coverage were more balanced.

Increasing the amount of protected nature is a policy-driven societal goal; we have decided that we want more strictly protected and protected natural areas, and that we want to reverse the biodiversity crisis. So we need to work together to get these large animals back into the wild.

What would you like to see the media do more of?

I'd like to see them take a little more interest in the vast majority of Danes who actually want this to happen. A great many people would like to see large animals and have wilder nature in Denmark.

In many places where there has been resistance, there are now local communities that are extremely positive about the change that has taken place with large grazing animals in the landscape. That's something worth reporting on as well.

Interview: Catrine Grønberg Jensen - director of Danmarks Naturfond, which owns and operates the Nature Destination Skovsgaard on Langeland

Trained biologist. Has worked for more than a decade as a municipal biologist in Aalborg, focusing on nature management, regulatory affairs, strategic planning, and biodiversity outreach.

Danmarks Naturfond was founded by the Danish Society for Nature Conservation and is a small foundation compared to, for example, the Danish Nature Fund, the Aage V. Jensen Nature Foundation, and 5. juni-fonden.

I ask her what her experience has been with the media coverage of the Nature Destination Skovsgaard.

When I visited Langeland, I got the distinct impression that the local media were opposed to the project, which involves transforming 300–400 hectares of land at Skovsgaard estate - which has, among other things, been used for organic farming - into wild nature.

Some sensationalist articles were written claiming that we were destroying wild nature by cutting down irreplaceable large trees and fences. We weren't asked for our side of the story. The municipality later came to see what had been cut down, and we were able to show that we hadn't cut down any irreplaceable trees. There was never a retraction.

When a road was washed away during the most recent storm surge, the local newspaper wrote that we were illegally refusing to restore the road along the coast. A road that, in all likelihood, would be washed away again. They wrote this based on an order we received from the municipality. But it turned out to be an illegal order, which we appealed because there was no legal basis for it in Danish law.

On the day of our grand opening during the fall break in 2022, there was a huge article about Skovsgaard closing. This was a particularly big problem for those who had opened a new café and restaurant, which was supposed to attract some guests.

They based the "news" on an old board meeting minutes from 2021.

But didn't they call you?

No. And they didn't correct the information either.

Fortunately, we can laugh about it today - we've established our own channels.

In addition to having a website and being on social media, we sometimes speak with the local radio station El Diablo, which has many listeners down here.

Do you have any idea why that happened?

No, but I had a strong feeling that anything related to the Danish Society for Nature Conservation was just being targeted.

Not all journalists are the same, but my impression is that there's a lot of clickbait in some small local newspapers, while the major newspapers are a bit more reputable.

The specific cases about the road that was washed away and the Skovsgaard Foundation, which believes that your actions on the ground violate its charter, are fair enough to write about - even though you ended up being proven right in both cases? (The latter case has been appealed to the High Court and is therefore not yet finally decided.)

Absolutely, that's what makes our work exciting. The problem arises when journalists don't take the time to investigate the matter properly. It takes time and effort, but instead, they just go with the interpretation of a local politician who says, "You just need to build that road." But according to the law, we're not allowed to do that.

What do you wish the media would cover?

Stories about rewilding that can inspire me, volunteers, and others working on nature projects. That kind of coverage can bring more joy and faith in a world that's otherwise in turmoil and chaos.

They could also be stories with real substance; for example, the media outlet Naturmonitor has been out in the field investigating and highlighting the complexity of laws and regulations, as well as how authorities handle rewilding. This can help others and point out where our legislation might need to be adjusted if we want more authentic nature without too much bureaucracy.

We lack a connection between Danes and nature, and that understanding can come through more in-depth storytelling. We lose that understanding when everything becomes clickbait.

What impact has the widespread media coverage had on your work?

My sense is that some people would like to pursue rewilding but don't dare to because they're afraid of being shut down by complaints, freedom of information requests, and harassment. Maybe we're a bit lucky here on Langeland because we're far away; we have a little more peace from the activists.

I believe that a free wildlife population with natural grazing and herd identity is best for the animals.

Of course, we're careful, and we don't want anyone to be able to say that the animals are suffering. But this can lead to fear-driven management, where animals are sent to the slaughterhouse just to be on the safe side, so no one can say there are too many animals for the available food in the area.

I will no longer succumb to fear-driven management.

Our animals lead rich, fulfilling, and good lives; it's my job to guarantee that, not just to have them shot or sent to the slaughterhouse. We no longer manage out of fear - we manage based on expertise.

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Interview: Morten DD Hansen - Independent nature interpreter and lecturer, trained biologist. Employed at Molslaboratoriet until 2024.

Morten DD Hansen is known for speaking his mind about his views on nature and wildlife, and has faced criticism for stirring up more conflict with his statements.

How do you view the media's coverage of nature and rewilding?

In the beginning, ten years ago, we received overwhelmingly positive press coverage at Molslaboratoriet. We represented something new and were in opposition to the establishment - something the press tends to like. But in 2021, wild nature became an official goal with the political decision to establish Nature National Parks.

Even though Molslaboratoriet isn't a state-run park, it seems as though we now represent the establishment - the very thing that anyone who's a bit of a troublemaker can oppose. Now we're the establishment. It's becoming a matter of: if we can take down Molslaboratoriet, then we can take down this entire nature agenda. And the press loves that. Because it's framed as the little guy's fight against the system.

That way, a small group of people - who can gather a maximum of 120 people for a demonstration - is allowed to dominate an entire agenda.

How?

People want to talk about others who feel something. And when it comes to biodiversity, it's, of course, a technical question of why one chooses to do what one does.

So when I'm asked to participate in a debate, I'm the expert. But I'm faced with someone who feels something. That makes it difficult, because we're operating on different taxonomic levels. No matter what facts I present, I can't change those feelings.

So I have to share my own feelings and explain what it means to me that the barn swallow is returning, or that there are so many flowers. That distinction - it's a huge challenge, and the press certainly hasn't understood it.

How nuanced are the articles and reports published in the media?

We've seen some exceptionally good articles published over the past five years as well. But the daily press coverage - the sensationalist stuff - focuses on the conflict. That generates clicks on Facebook. I've heard from a debate editor that nature-related conflicts get the most hits now. Before, it was refugees.

Nature is more conflict-ridden now - with the wolf, our landscapes, and the countryside versus the city. It has truly become a major marker of identity politics. That's also why the positions are becoming so entrenched. And Molslaboratoriet has simply become a focal point for that debate.

That's made it easier for me to handle. I don't take it personally. To me, it's just politics.

People have been accustomed to a narrative of more than 100 years of cultivating and harnessing the world. What is lost outwardly must be gained inwardly. And then some biologists come along and propose a completely different narrative. That can really sting - I can certainly understand that. It's a kind of culture war.

If you ask the Danes - as the University of Copenhagen, among others, has done - a majority would like to see more nature and rewilding, including large grazing animals. What's the missing link between those attitudes and the stories we see in the media?

Most stories aren't really about nature, but about individual animals and an understanding of animal welfare that focuses on the individual animal as a being. It must not suffer. Biologists are, of course, a bit more pragmatic. We know that the world is full of suffering to a certain extent. We look at the population, a herd. Whether it's thriving. If a horse breaks a leg, that's just part of life. And that, of course, provokes all livestock owners in this country.

We also need to be more honest, and not just sell a positive story. Life as a wild horse isn't always a bed of roses. It's also a real struggle sometimes, I think. Right now (in March), there's very little food in the wild, before things really start to grow. The animals are having a hard time right now. And soon there will be plenty.

But the animals get to live a full life, instead of that kind of life where there's always food.

When I visit high schools, I give them this example: I could offer you a sheltered home for the rest of your lives. Plenty of good food. Plenty of sex. TV. Everything. But it's a sheltered home, and then we'll turn it off when you're 80.

But I can also offer you a life with ups and downs. That is, deep, deep sorrow. Deep, deep joy. Everything in between. We don't know when you'll die. And they'll all choose that life. With ups and downs.

As the press, we'd like to see ourselves as people who actually provide an accurate picture of the world. Do we?

I'd like to see some analyses where the press actually aims to gain a better understanding of what's really at stake.

I wish the media would address some of the underlying layers in the nature debate - the social bias, our historical conception of the countryside.

There's no shortage of articles about some person or other who's settled out in the middle of nowhere. And now come fields plastered with solar panels, the wind turbines, or the Nature National Park. That's the story every day. And that's where the press is. It's truly counterproductive to the green transition. The press isn't leading the way. It's working against it.

But it's also important to understand that the green transition has a social dimension. It's the unskilled forest workers who risk losing their jobs when we create wild nature. It would be good to include those voices, rather than ending up in the usual conflict that leads nowhere.

Now we're talking about the role of the media, but much of the debate is taking place on social media. Has press coverage had a moderating or amplifying effect on these conflicts?

Exacerbating, definitely. I mean, we know every time - and I can see it - I can see that the press loves it. "Oh, is there any news about Molslab?" Whenever there's a conflict. I mean, that's just the way it is. That's the business model today, down to the smallest detail - it's all about clicks.

I mean, sorry, but that's just how it is. At least most of the time.

What are the consequences?

There are a lot of people who'd like to work more with nature, but who are being very cautious now. But the movement has been set in motion, and I find some comfort in that. You can't really go back to traditional nature management.

Much of this upheaval taking place in our nature management in recent years requires good examples. And it takes time. We're just so damn impatient. But an enormous amount has happened in 10 years. When the government at the time introduced the "Nature Plan Denmark" in 2014, the goal was to set aside 250 hectares of untouched forest. Today, the goal is to set aside 75,000. That's a 300-fold increase in the amount of untouched forest set aside. In 12 years. Things are definitely heading in the right direction.

Molslaboratoriet as a Case Study

As can be seen from the four interviews with nature conservation experts, they feel that the press often - though not always - reports on nature projects in a one-sided and conflict-oriented manner. They believe that certain aspects of these often-complex processes are covered, while others are overlooked or omitted.

I've chosen to examine the media's approach by looking at the coverage of a specific project: Molslaboratoriet.

Background on Molslaboratoriet

The hilly nature area on Mols has been owned by the Natural History Museum Aarhus since 1941 as a protected nature reserve with research facilities. The area is one of Denmark's most thoroughly studied nature areas.

In 2016, the Rewilding Mols project was launched, allowing wild Exmoor ponies and Galloway cattle to occupy 120 of the area's 147 hectares. Mechanical land management was replaced by a nature management approach where nature takes care of itself, fostering a high level of biodiversity. This requires large grazers, namely horses and cattle (or, for example, moose, oxen, elephants, etc.).

At the same time, biologists have studied the effects of rewilding with animals in the area.

The hills of Mols are neither the first nor the only place in Denmark where horses and cattle graze year-round. But here, the animal herds have been the subject of many conflicts, police reports, harassment of staff, illegal feeding of the animals, and much more.

The opposition has been driven primarily by the association "Stop vanrøgt af dyr bag hegn," which is active on social media. The criticism has garnered support from a number of politicians, of whom Pia Kjærsgaard of the Danish People's Party is arguably the most prominent.

Despite numerous reports to the authorities and countless inspections by the police, veterinarians, and the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, there has been one instance in which Molslaboratoriet received criticism from the authorities responsible for monitoring animal welfare (see fact box).

On April 15, 2026, the Hempel Foundation took over Molslaboratoriet, announcing that the animals would now be fed according to their needs.

Fact Box: Fine for GPS Malfunction

In each herd of horses at Molslaboratoriet, one of the horses wears a GPS collar around its neck. This allows researchers to track the horses' movements.

In 2021, a pregnant mare was wearing a collar that had become crooked and was chafing her. The owner of Molslaboratoriet, the Natural History Museum, did not want to disturb the horse just before she was due to foal.

When the GPS transmitter was finally removed, the mare had open sores on her neck. The museum's director, Bo Skaarup, agreed that it was a misjudgment.

The matter was reported to the police, and the case resulted in a fine of 3,000 kroner.

Source: Zetland

How I Conducted My Review of the Articles

To examine the media's approach to covering the Molslaboratoriet, I searched for all articles (search term: Molslaboratoriet*) on TV2 Østjylland, DR.DK, and Informedia/Retriever, where I searched national, Jutland regional, and local newspapers. Opinion pieces and editorials are not included in the count, but I did read excerpts from the debate along the way.

I have read only online articles; I have not watched or listened to news segments or viewed any graphics in print.

The articles - 295 in total - were read and coded based on five user needs: Update me, update me with nuance, educate me, show me the solution, and fascinate me. In addition, I focused on how different types of articles addressed the conflicts surrounding Molslaboratoriet.

Fact Box: User Needs

A way to reach readers through different article types, such as Guides, traditional news stories, profiles, etc.

Developed by Dmitry Shishkin at the BBC in 2017

Used by Politiken and Jyllands-Posten, among others

In 2017, 70 percent of the BBC's news stories were traditional news reports; only seven percent of users preferred the narrative approach (BBC).

Young people and those who are news-fatigued want narrative formats other than traditional news.

Currently, 34 percent of Danes do not read, watch, or listen to the news.

Sources: Reuters Institute and BBC

“Update me with nuance” is my own variation, included to ensure that I could note when news articles took a more in-depth approach with fact boxes, multiple sources, and attempts to help the reader better understand the context.

After coding, I counted how many stories there were in each category. Each article is included here only once, even if the story in question was published in multiple outlets. This applies, for example, to many of TV2 Østjylland's articles, which found their way to other media outlets via Ritzau, or articles from Aarhus Stiftstidende, which are also published in Horsens Folkeblad.

As a result, the distribution of articles will not reflect the total exposure to different angles that media users have encountered. I can see that breaking news (“Update me”) typically spreads faster and reaches further into other media than the more in-depth, longer, and thoroughly researched articles or reports (e.g., “Educate me” or “Show me the solution”). These are often found on media outlets with paywalls. This means that “Update me” news actually occupies a much larger share of the media landscape than my count would otherwise indicate.

Each article was also evaluated based on the criterion: Does it make me wiser about nature? Yes/No.

Fact Box: Codes for Nature Articles

1. Show me the solution

Based on the principles of constructive journalism, the text receives a score of 1 if it points toward solutions for nature and/or people. For example, by providing examples of how specific initiatives demonstrate that they are saving species, that someone has solved a problem, or that someone has facilitated mediation or understanding between opposing parties, etc.

2. Educate me

Articles that broadly present one or more nature projects and describe their goals, background, methods, and challenges - but do not offer concrete solutions - receive a score of 2. Or articles that report on the state of nature. Or those that explain the background for a change in animal welfare legislation and its impact on nature, animals, and people.

3. Update me

News articles written in the traditional news style are assigned a score of 3. They are often structured around conflict, following this pattern: Someone criticizes something (there is conflict), followed by the right of reply. These are assigned a score of 3. The articles typically do not delve into the substance or significance for nature.

4. Update me with nuance

A rating of 4 is given to articles that are also structured like traditional news stories but provide the reader with nuance and context to understand why a conflict exists and how these conflicts affect animals, people, society, and/or nature.

5. Fascinate me

Articles that focus on experiences in the natural environment - such as "See the new calves" or "New butterfly spotted" - are assigned number 5. These are often single-source stories, travel articles, or guides. They may also cover research findings.

Article Content

When evaluating the content of the articles, I have focused on the headline, the angle, which quotes are highlighted, how sources are presented, the tone, and the impression I, as a reader, am left with regarding a given topic. I have also considered what information (if any) I feel is missing.

In this way, I draw on the framing model developed in 1993 by Robert M. Entman, a professor of Media and Public Affairs at The George Washington University.

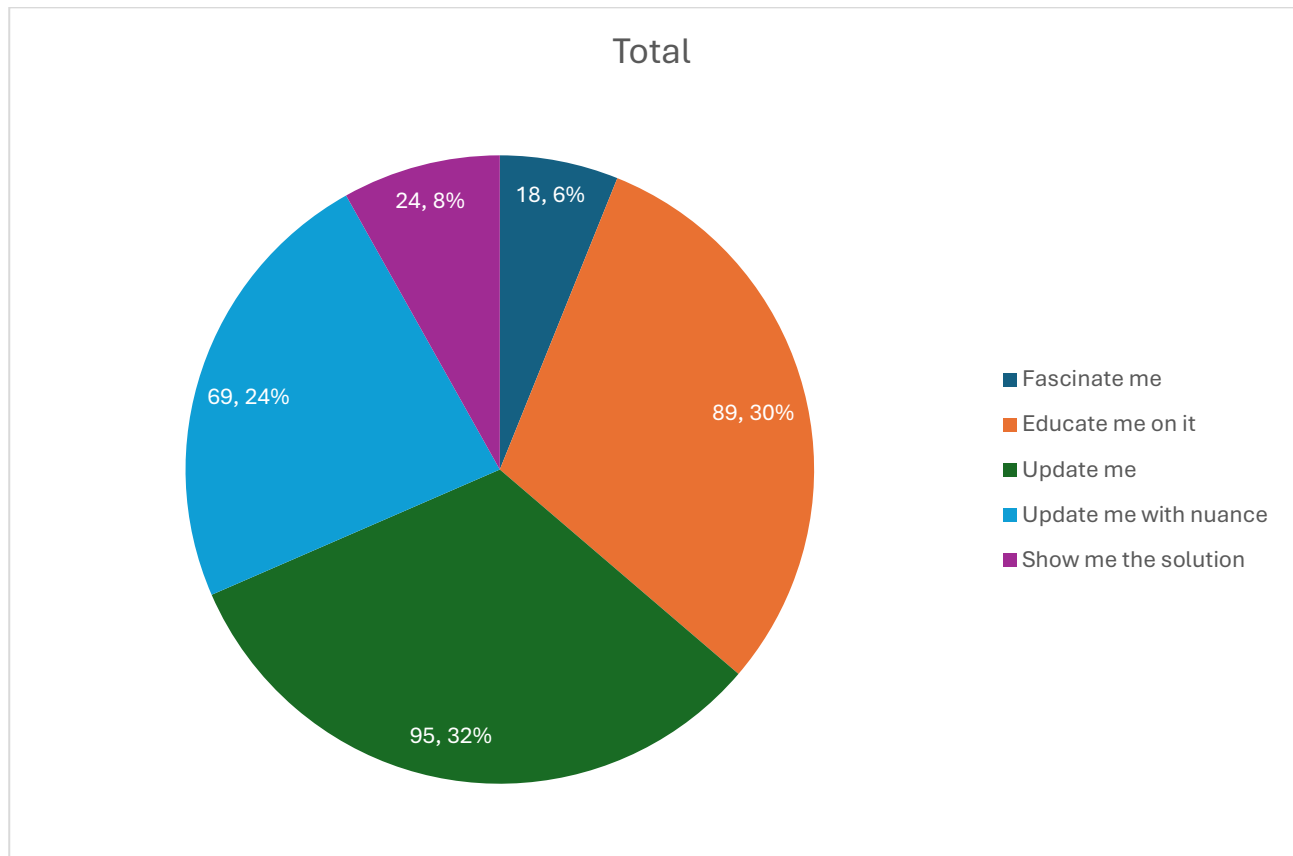
The model describes how texts always select certain aspects of the topic being described, so that I, as a reader, am left with a specific perception of which **problem** is emphasized most strongly in a given story. The aspects of the story that are highlighted give me an understanding of what **the cause** is. The **moral** judgment is the next point - who is the villain? Finally, the article may contain **proposed solutions**, but it does not always do so (sometimes the solution may also be implicit, such as maintaining the status quo).

Or, as Robert M. Entman writes in "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm": *'To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described'*

According to Robert M. Entman, framing analysis is influenced by both the individual reader and the sender, the surrounding society, and many other factors, but the model is widely recognized for creating a common language for how content is "framed" - that is, how it is understood. *'Whatever its specific use,'* writes Entman, *'the concept of framing consistently provides a way to describe the power of a communicating text. Analysis of frames illuminates the precise way in which influence over human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location - such as a speech, utterance, news report, or novel - to that consciousness.'*

Overview of the Articles - Quantitative Analysis

The figures from my comprehensive coding of 295 articles about Molslaboratoriet over a five-year period tell a clear story.



The figure shows how the 295 articles about Molslaboratoriet, or in which Molslaboratoriet is mentioned, are distributed. The articles are coded according to five simple user needs.

First and foremost, the analysis shows that more than half - 164 out of 295 - of the articles read about Molslaboratoriet fall into the categories “update me” (95) or “Update me with nuance” (69).

These are typically articles that deal with the conflict, as described in the fact box “Codes for Nature Articles” above.

I’m highlighting this because these types of articles often give the reader a picture of the conflict but not much background to understand what’s at stake. However, in just over a third of the “Update me” articles - those with nuances - there’s more context for me, as a reader, to understand the conflict.

But “Update me” articles are well-suited for tracking what’s happening right now; they very rarely point the way forward.

At the same time, we know from the Reuters Institute that “Update me” articles are the type of news that people with news avoidance are least likely to seek out. You could say that we know a headline focused on conflict can generate a lot of clicks. But at the same time, a growing group of people is stopping following the news.

In the latest Digital News Report from the Reuters Institute, 34 percent of Danes say they consciously try to avoid the news. In the 2025 report, the figure for news avoidance in Denmark was 27 percent.

Finally, it’s worth noting that the proportion of “Update me” articles would be even higher if I had counted how many media outlets each article appeared in, since they are often published in multiple outlets. As I explained in the section on how I read the articles, each article is counted only once for its content. In other words, many “Update me” articles have reached a wide range of channels.

The analysis also shows that “Educate me” articles account for 89 of the 295 articles about Molslaboratoriet. They are characterized by their attempt to inspire readers and educate them about the context surrounding ongoing rewilding efforts (as also described in the fact box “Codes for Nature Articles” above).

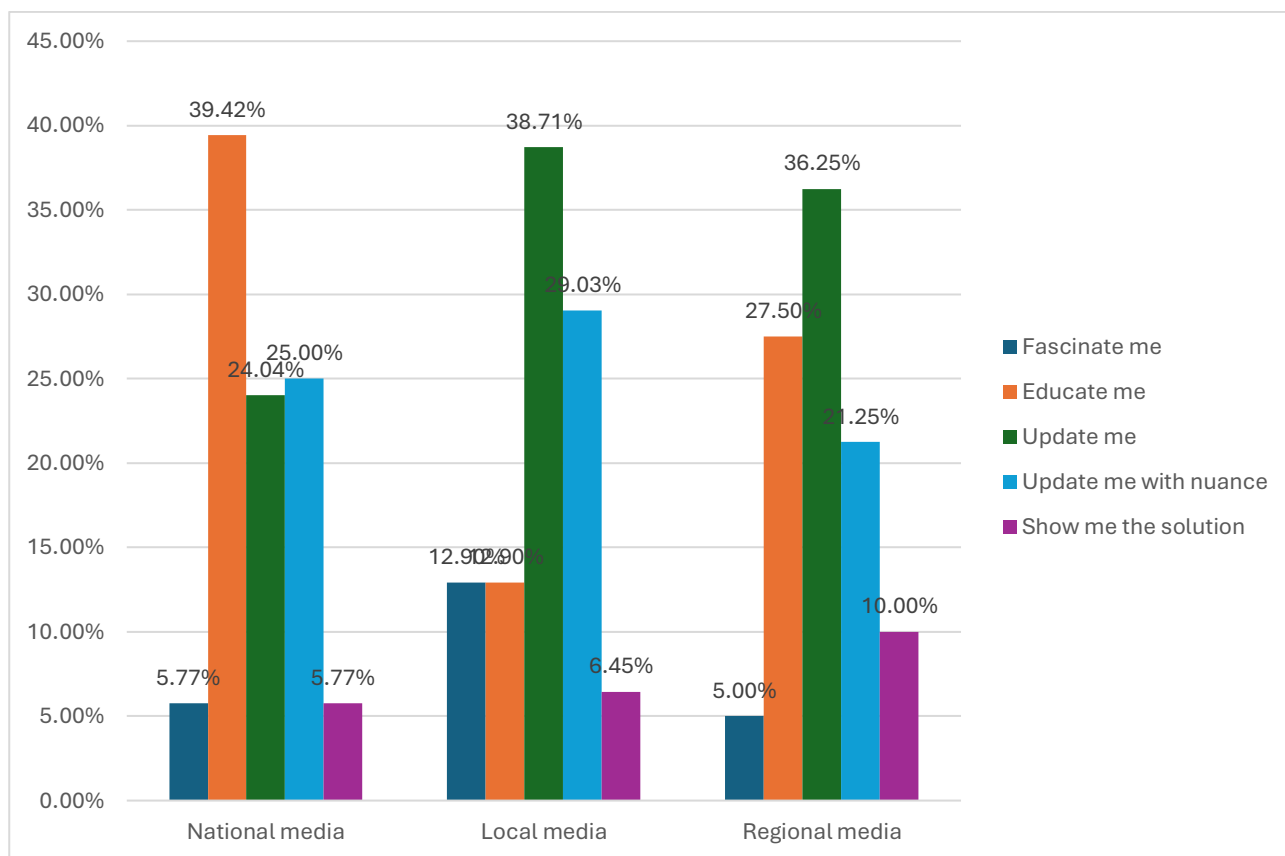
Finally, the analysis shows that the number of articles focusing on solutions and fascination is 24 and 18, respectively.

The “Show me the solution” articles can be relatively short and deal with mediation attempts between conflicting parties, or they can be lengthy reports on how other places manage year-round grazing animals to the delight of both the animals and their neighbors.

The “Fascinate me” articles fall into this category because they are written to inspire people who want to explore the area, or they describe the fascination of new insects or other subjects that researchers have studied.

Distribution Across Different Media

In the chart below, you can see how the different types of stories are distributed across media outlets.



Perhaps not surprisingly, it is the major national media outlets that publish the most “Educate me” stories. These are more time-consuming and require more resources. One might think it would be difficult for a small, local newsroom to produce them.

In the national media, “Educate me” articles account for nearly 40 percent, “Update me” for 24 percent, and “Update me with nuance” for 25 percent. National media includes both general-interest and tabloid newspapers.

But “fascinate me” and “show me the solution” each account for only 5 percent. In other words, there aren’t many attempts to cover Molslaboratoriet in a more solutions-oriented way or with a sense of fascination for the rewilding work taking place there.

Regional media (and here I’m referring only to regional newspapers in Jutland, plus TV2 Østjylland) write “educate me” stories about 27 percent of the time they cover Molslaboratoriet. At the same time, “update me” accounts for as much as 37 percent, while “update me with nuance” is down around 20 percent.

In other words, there’s a fairly high number of news articles about the conflict - but the regional outlets are also more diligent in covering the area than the national newspapers.

At the same time, regional news outlets are twice as good at describing solutions as national media. In my coding, I classify 10 percent of the stories as “Show me the solution.” “Fascinate me” articles account for only about 4 percent.

In the smaller local newspapers, there’s a full-on focus on quick “Update me” news stories, which account for nearly 42 percent, followed by “Update me with nuance,” at 29 percent. Often, these stories center on reports of local demonstrations, statements from activists, or visits by politicians. I also see content that appears to come directly from social media.

Nearly 13 percent are categorized as “Educate me,” where the local press makes an effort to dig a little deeper. Just under 10 percent are “Fascinate me” articles, sometimes based on press releases, but they serve as a source of local information. A good 6 percent of local articles can be classified as “Show me the solution,” meaning that even small local media outlets are stronger in this area than the relatively well-resourced national media.

What the Codes Revealed – Qualitative Analysis

My interpretation of the articles is based both on my professional analysis of articles in general (what is present, what carries weight, what is missing) and on many years of journalistic coverage of the natural environment, and it draws on Professor Robert M. Entman’s framing analysis, as described above.

CODE 1: Show me the solution

The “Show me the solution” articles range from pieces on public dialogue about nature-based solutions to concrete advice on navigating areas with free-roaming cattle. There are articles about private individuals creating their own solutions and a contribution from a British rewilding expert who does not understand the Danish conflicts.

According to my coding and tally, there have been 24 such articles over the past five years.

Here are a few typical examples:

Article: Baron’s Land Purchased by Foundation: Today, Neighbor Is Happy with the Outcome

On April 27, 2026, TV2 Østjylland aired a report from Saksfjed Vildmark on Lolland, which since 2023 has been owned and operated by the Hempel Foundation, the new owner of Molslaboratoriet.

In the report, the TV2 Østjylland journalist speaks with the neighbor, the local journalist, and Thor Hjarsen, a biologist and director of Vildmarken - the collective name the Hempel Foundation uses for its four nature areas in Denmark.

The solutions-oriented approach here can be summed up as: Show me the good example that we can learn from. The article examines how Saksfjed manages to keep its neighbors happy and, seemingly without conflict, carries out rewilding on an 800-hectare area with approximately 200 animals (Exmoor ponies, Galloway cattle, and Tauros cattle).

The local journalist reports that there have been no complaints about the animals in the area. The 86-year-old neighbor is happy to be able to walk, bike, and drive through Saksfjed Vildmark.

Thor Hjarsen believes that the solutions lie in engaging the local community and focusing on the animals' well-being.

"We know that animal welfare, year-round grazing, and biodiversity can easily go hand in hand," Thor Hjarsen tells TV2 Østjylland.

He hopes to draw on his experiences, go on trips, and engage in conversations with the residents of Mols - something that makes the local history of Lolland relevant to TV2 Østjylland's readers, listeners, and viewers.

Article: She sold her life's work and spent the millions on the wildest thing imaginable.

On November 21, 2025, Børsen published an article about midwife Nina Stork, who founded Denmark's first fertility clinic offering insemination and fertility treatment to single women and lesbian women.

Now she has sold her life's work and invested the money in a piece of land on Bornholm. The article examines the financial considerations of the project and the value of local collaboration in creating nature on her land.

The solutions-oriented aspect here is that the article can provide ideas for others while also describing the doubts and some of the practical challenges of embarking on a large-scale nature project as a private individual.

From a framing perspective, these stories are generally characterized by the fact that the **problem** described concerns how to solve environmental challenges. **The cause** of the problem is the way humans have organized society, which has proven to harm the environment, animals, and biodiversity. The **moral** judgment is that society should do something about the problem. **The proposed solutions** may involve social initiatives, concrete actions in the landscape, or other measures to rectify the situation.

CODE 2: Educate me

There are many “Educate me” articles (89), and they cover a wide range of topics.

From articles in this headline that promise readers they’ll “understand rewilding” to research findings on the impact of horses and cows in the wild. From the story of the giraffe Marius and the living conditions of wild horses viewed through the lens of animal ethics to critical, multi-sourced articles about the Danish Nature Agency’s neglect of cows on Mols (a case involving animal husbandry on a neighboring property to Molslaboratoriet). And from articles on Danes’ views of nature to portraits of some of those working to rewild the landscape.

In an article dated August 15, 2022, Berlingske Tidende asks:

Do we even understand nature anymore?

In the wake of an incident involving six bulls attempting to mate with two cows and chasing them around the Molslaboratoriet grounds, Berlingske asks Peter Sandøe, a professor of bioethics at the Department of Veterinary and Animal Sciences at the University of Copenhagen, for his perspective on the “case.”

The article is an “educate me” piece, because by turning to an expert in the field, it attempts to delve into an issue and give readers an understanding of its depth.

Peter Sandøe speaks out following a series of critical articles and opinion pieces on the matter, describing it as “an alienated reaction to nature.”

“It can also happen in nature that a herd of male animals is too aggressive toward a female. Nature isn’t as harmonious as people think. Here, of course, the animals are behind a fence, so you do what you would do with a herd of cattle and remove the bulls. I have a hard time seeing the animal ethics problem,” Peter Sandøe tells Berlingske.

According to Peter Sandøe, the situation isn’t necessarily due to the animals being fenced in, the newspaper continues:

“Populations do not always develop according to a harmonious model. It also happens in nature that there are too many males relative to females,” he says, emphasizing that life isn’t exactly a bed of roses for cows and bulls in agriculture either, where bulls are considered surplus stock.

Most bull calves are taken from their mothers after one day, live in indoor systems, and are then slaughtered when they are just under a year old.

Ritzau News Agency published the following article on March 5, 2026:

Study: Wild horses and cattle in Mols Bjerger create a more resilient natural environment.

The article discusses a scientific paper on the significance of ten years of rewilding at Molslaboratoriet and is published shortly before the Natural History Museum Aarhus transfers Molslaboratoriet to the Hempel Foundation.

Readers are provided with background information to help them understand what nature and rewilding are all about.

Ritzau News Agency reports on the research article, which explains what has happened in the area: Nature has become more resilient and resistant to extreme weather. And why this is happening: Horses and cattle graze the vegetation down to the ground, making room for flowering plants and, consequently, more insects. After a drought, nature recovers more quickly in areas where the animals have roamed.

It is also mentioned as background information that activists criticize Molslaboratoriet for not taking sufficient care of the animals, but that Molslaboratoriet rejects this (the article does not, however, mention that the relevant authority, the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, has also consistently rejected the criticism).

In an article featuring criticism from one of the most active animal rights activists regarding animal welfare at Molslaboratoriet, TV2 Østjylland takes a thorough look at the issue in an article from March 2, 2021:

“Animal Welfare Expert on Horses in Mols Bjerger: This Is Highly Criticizable.”

In a series of quotes, Dorthe Bräuner Jensen expresses her concerns for the animals and leveled accusations against the system. She does not rule out feeding the animals, even though it is illegal, and says, among other things:

“It’s highly reprehensible. They’re sacrificing animals that were actually protected by the Danish Animal Welfare Act just to get some beetles and insects.”

The article then turns to the other side of the issue: the authorities responsible for ensuring the horses’ welfare. TV2 Østjylland includes, among other things, a photo of an inspection report from the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration following an unannounced visit.

Virksomhed **Naturhistorisk Museum**

Adresse **Strandkærvej 8**

Postnr./By **8400 Ebeltøft**

Kontrolsted

Kontrolleret	Resultat
Husdyrsygdomme	
Hygiejne	
Omsætning	
Godkendelser m.v.	
Drift og indretning	
Smittebeskyttelse	
Dyrevelfærd: Besætning	1
Transport	
Virksomhed	
Egenkontrol	
Zoonoser	
Medicin: Besætning	

CVR-nr. **29073910**

CHR-nr. **72760**

Besætnings ID **72760-1213**

Andet nr.

Aut./Godk./Reg.nr.

Dato **09-02-2021**

Start kl. **12:20**

Slut kl. **14:30**

Tilsynsførendes bemærkninger

side 1 af 1

Dyrevelfærd besætning: Uanmeldt kontrolbesøg på baggrund af anonym anmeldelse om tre magre kreaturer og frosne drikkestationer.

Til stede: Jeppe Flarup og dyrlæge Anne Hels.

Seks kreaturer tilset på arealet op til Fuglsøvej. Frostfri drikkestation bag Strandkærvej 10 set. Resten af de 15 kreaturer kunne ikke lokaliseres. Jeppe Flarup tager individuelle billeder af alle dyr en gang om ugen. De nyeste billeder er set og dyrenes huld er vurderet uden bemærkninger.

Dyrene følges nøje hver dag på parametrene huld og adfærd.

Det vurderes, at der er kvalificeret og intensiv daglig opsyn med dyrene.

Dyrlægens rapport for det årlige tilsyn set d. 11. februar 2021.

Ingen anmærkninger

TV2 Østjylland shows a photo of the inspection report, which states that all livestock are in good condition, based on their body condition and behavior.

The article also shares experiences from southern Langeland, where wild horses have been managed for 15 years according to the same principles as at Molslaboratoriet. Just as at Molslaboratoriet, one must comply with the Animal Welfare Act and monitor the horses on a daily basis.

Fact boxes provide information about the animals and a warning that it can harm them if outsiders start feeding them.

The framing in the “Educate Me” articles typically describes the **problem** as one of ignorance and social conflict surrounding nature and the way it is managed. **The root** of the problem lies in historical ties to an agricultural mindset that views animals in a certain way, and a lack of connection to true nature, of which we have very little in Denmark. The **moral** judgment is that we need to understand nature better and see the full picture of an issue. **The proposed solutions** include both knowledge from researchers and experts, as well as meta-analyses of conflicts and suggestions for how we, as a society, can bridge them.

CODE 3: Update me.

The articles in the “Update me” group are typically shorter news articles, though not exclusively so. There is a great deal of conflict and a focus on the attitudes and actions of animal rights activists and their consequences. Two specific cases involving the animals at Molslaboratoriet and one concerning animal welfare on the neighboring property - which is operated by the Danish Nature Agency - take up a significant portion of the coverage.

In approximately 40 “Update me” articles, animal rights activists convey messages about neglect. In particular, they claim that the animals are starving because they are not being fed but must survive year-round on whatever grows on the Molslaboratoriet grounds. Or that they are otherwise being poorly cared for.

On January 28, 2022, BT published the article:

Wild horses reported to the police: ‘It’s not a free life when we put the horses behind a barbed-wire fence.’

In a quote, an animal rights activist says: “It just makes me so sad and angry that people can treat animals this way, putting them behind fences. I’m outraged that animals are being used as tools for a purpose they call biodiversity,” (says Marianne Hansen in the article).

Bo Skaarup, director of Molslaboratoriet, states in the article that they comply with all regulations under the Animal Welfare Act.

In fact, the article does not mention that the horses are not kept behind barbed wire, but behind ordinary electric fences, which are used everywhere where animals are kept behind fences.

On May 26, 2022, the BT article was published

“Animal Activists Prepare for Protest: ‘We Won’t Stand by and Watch Animals Starve Winter After Winter.’”

The article does not contain any right of reply regarding the claim that the animals are starving.

Three days later, on May 29, 2022, the newspaper published the article

“After Piles of Reports of Animal Cruelty - Only One Charge Against Molslaboratoriet.”

Citing the police and the Ministry of Justice as sources.

In fact, the charge relates to a GPS collar that was fitted incorrectly and caused injuries to a horse. This is an incident that Molslaboratoriet acknowledges and regrets, and which later results in a fine of 3,000 kroner.

Using video and photos from Øxenholt - who has become a well-known activist - TV2 Østjylland aired a news report on February 25, 2022, featuring Svend Hansen, who is illegally feeding the horses at Molslaboratoriet. Headline:

Activists are feeding the wild horses; now one of them is speaking out.

He “comes forward” and says in a highlighted quote: “I’m tired of doing this in secret because I believe I’m doing the right thing.”

He himself says in the article that he does not have “extensive biological knowledge,” but that he knows “the horses in Mols Bjerger are not doing well.”

The police and Molslaboratoriet, as the authorities handling the case, have responded by calling the feeding - which several activists are behind - vandalism.

“It’s a research project that comes to a standstill when someone feeds the animals.

Researchers take daily fecal samples from the horses, and those samples can’t be used if the horses have been given other food,” explains Deputy Police Inspector Kristian Juliussen of the East Jutland Police to TV2 Østjylland.

The same Øxenholt is profiled in an article on December 5, 2022:

Per Quits 112 and Goes All In on Animal Welfare

After 20 years as a 112 photographer, he is quitting that job and will focus on covering animal welfare in the future, he states in the article. Even though he stands to lose half a million kroner due to this career change.

“I’m doing this because I think there are so many animal welfare issues that get swept under the rug in all sorts of places. So I’m shutting down my work with 112 to be more proactive and critical,” Per Øxenholt tells TV2 Østjylland.

A new animal welfare organization will help finance Øxenholt’s work as a photographer, and he says in the article that his camera is his weapon.

“My view is that what they (Molslaboratoriet, ed.) are doing is a disgrace, and now I’m going to spend time digging into it,” he says.

On March 8, 2024, Vejle Amts Folkeblad published the following article:

Politicians want to avoid rewilding, as in the hotly debated project on Mols

Molslaboratoriet is used as an example of what they want to avoid, without the article presenting any facts about the alleged poor treatment of the animals.

When these current stories are framed in a certain way, they get headlines like:

Dorthe Woken Up by the Police: They've Charged Me with Feeding a Horse (BT: February 26, 2022)

and

Watch video: The conflict at Molslaboratoriet ended in accusations of violence (Randers Amtsavis, May 30, 2022)

There is also conflict in posts presenting Molslaboratoriet's biologist's view of the matter:

Biologist Reported to the Police Responds to Critics: It Is Not Our Goal for the Animals to Survive

Several politicians are speaking out with criticism of Molslaboratoriet.

Pernille Vermund Ready for Saturday Stunt in the National Park

as reported by Adresseavisen Syddjurs on November 13, 2021. Speaking to the newspaper, Bent Schouw, the local lead candidate for Nye Borgerlige, says:

"From the visitor center, everyone can get an overview of 10 years of environmental destruction, neglect of the animals, and the blocking of public access to local nature and historic sites."

In an article in BT about the police charging four people for feeding horses, Karina Adsbøll, MP (formerly of the Danish People's Party), said:

"I find it concerning that they're spending time charging citizens instead of worrying about the animals' welfare."

Zenia Stampe, on the other hand, asks then-Minister of Justice Peter Hummelgaard (S) what he intends to do to stop the harassment of staff, illegal feeding, etc., by the activists. TV2 Østjylland reports on this on March 6, 2024, in the article:

Now she wants an answer from the minister. It is untenable that the neglect case continues

Although Zenia Stampe is calling for action against the harassment of employees, it is the word “neglect” that ends up in the headline as the core of the case.

A series of articles describes the activists’ actions from the other side.

TV2 Østjylland and TV MidtVest report on a small clothing brand that finds itself in hot water after donating money to the Danish Nature Fund (which supports rewilding).

Clothing Brand in a Backlash: Accused of Animal Neglect

But they also report on support for the clothing brand:

Clothing brand found itself in a shitstorm. Now the tide has turned

When I read the “Update me” articles, I find that the overall **problem** is described as the animals being mistreated, not getting enough to eat, and not being monitored closely enough - in violation of the Animal Welfare Act. Although the articles differ, they repeatedly mention reports and allegations of neglect. It’s rarely mentioned that these reports and allegations don’t lead to convictions or fines. So, as a reader, I’m left with the allegations. **The root** of the problem is rewilding - that is, prioritizing nature over the welfare of certain animals - and the fact that the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, veterinarians, the police, and animal caretakers are lying about the animals’ condition. The overarching **moral judgment** is that keeping year-round grazing animals is “a disgrace” and that the activists are heroes. **The proposed solutions** are that we should stop rewilding - or at the very least, stop keeping year-round grazing animals behind fences. Until then, the solution is to continue monitoring, reporting cases, and feeding the animals illegally.

CODE 4: Update me with nuance

The articles in this group largely deal with the same topics as those coded as “Update me.” However, they offer more explanations, greater depth, and typically a more neutral tone.

The reason they are not coded as “Educate me” is that they are still very news- and conflict-driven, yet also balanced.

For example, on May 7, 2021, Jyllands-Posten brings in Director Bo Skaarup from the outset in the story about the horse and the GPS collar. He agrees with the criticism.

GPS Collar Causes Injuries - Museum Director Apologizes

Kristeligt Dagblad writes on April 27, 2024

News Profile: We're Receiving Threats Beyond Imagination

An interview with Molslab Director Bo Skaarup in connection with a hearing on harassment of employees.

On June 3, 2024, TV2 Østjylland investigates how many man-hours the numerous reports - particularly from animal rights activists - cost the police and writes:

The dispute is draining police resources: An absolutely insane number of hours

The article, via Ritzau, is quoted in many other media outlets across the country. This sets in motion a process in which other police districts can learn from the East Jutland Police how to handle similar conflicts.

The article **“Politician Lashed Out at Animal Rights Activists”** from *Aarhus Stiftstidende* on February 16, 2026, offers several proposed solutions but has an angle on the conflict itself. In the article, Torsten Gejl, a member of parliament for the Alternative, says, among other things: “We may need several hundred thousand animals. It would be great if they could come from Danish breeders who can share their experience on how to help them thrive and ensure their animal welfare.”

The newspaper Avisen Danmark uses the story about “the randy bulls” to report on Stråsø Nature National Park’s plans to pair breeding-age females and males. The article presents a nuanced discussion of what constitutes good animal welfare and how it can be achieved.

The headline reads:

Rewilding cost four bulls their lives in Mols Bjerge - yet the Nature National Park defies experts’ warnings against replicating the approach

From a framing perspective, the stories are generally characterized by conflicts surrounding Molslaboratoriet, animal welfare, and rewilding. **The root** of the problem is that there is deep disagreement about what is best for animals and nature, and that the way we have organized our lives has proven to harm the environment, animals, and biodiversity. The **moral** judgment is that there is a lot of fuss over these animals. But it also implies that society needs to better understand nature and seek solutions in this area. **Proposed solutions** may involve social initiatives, concrete actions in the landscape, or other measures to rectify the current state of affairs.

CODE 5: Fascinate me

A small group of articles aims to attract readers and tell them about nature on Mols. These are typically inspirational pieces and travel articles. However, profiles of active nature enthusiasts and guides are also categorized as “Fascinate me” articles.

Denmark's WILDEST Municipality: Norddjurs and Syddjurs Have Signed Up

While the coronavirus is keeping Danes at home in 2021, Fyens Stiftstidende reported on March 11 about rare plants you can seek out: "Jernhatten on Mols: Climate, flora, and fauna as if it were the steppes of Eastern Europe."

In the article "**I Watch Birds from My Kitchen Window**" from March 30, 2026, biologist Morten DD Hansen teaches one of Politiken's journalists how best to get started with birdwatching, identifying birds, and recognizing their calls.

Under "Fascinate Me," there may not be a defined **problem**, but rather a desire for inspiration to get out and experience something. Some articles about research aim to make the reader more knowledgeable about nature and perhaps also about how fascinating it is. **The motivation** is typically related to a vacation, a specific type of outing, or a desire to try something new - such as birdwatching. Or to gain new knowledge. The moral of the story is that it's good to get out into nature. And/or that we should know and understand it. **The proposed solutions** focus heavily on practical approaches or new knowledge that can be applied to find solutions.

Conclusion Based on a Review of Articles

After reading through and coding 295 articles, speaking with experts, and following the debate, it is clear that, viewed through the lens of the overall media coverage, the conflict surrounding Molslaboratoriet has been reported in a way that escalates the conflict and lacks nuance.

In particular, the "Update me" articles - which make up well over half of the articles - contribute to magnifying or entrenching the conflict. This type of article is widely cited, in contrast to "Show me the solution" or "Educate me" articles, which are often only available in the media outlet that published the story and are behind a paywall.

Most articles meet journalistic standards for right of reply, but as the framing analyses show, the mix of emotional voices and factual, authoritative responses ends up creating a narrative that rewilding or nature projects lead to animal cruelty. Responses or rights of reply often appear far down in the article. The "Update me" articles often devolve into a clash of opposing claims, leaving me, the reader, none the wiser.

Reports of animal cruelty filed on a large scale by activists against both Molslaboratoriet and its employees are frequently mentioned. Conversely, there are few articles that state that only one of the many reports has resulted in charges, an indictment, and a fine.

Phrases such as "controversial," "criticized for poor animal welfare," and similar terms are used in articles that mention Molslaboratoriet. However, there is no explanation as to whether

the criticism is valid or what the basis for the controversy is. In this way, a narrative is constructed portraying Molslaboratoriet as a problematic place.

A few articles contain errors in which different cases and different parties are conflated, so that Molslaboratoriet is held responsible for a case in which the Danish Nature Agency's animals were underfed and had to be euthanized. Or where Mols Bjerge National Park is conflated with the Danish Nature Agency and Molslaboratoriet.

Among other things, this has meant that the National Park is accused of animal cruelty that has nothing to do with them. And that Molslaboratoriet is linked to an actual case of animal neglect, even though it was their neighbor who was responsible.

Nature is absent from about half of the articles, even though the media is writing about an area where efforts are underway to restore nature. Only 148 articles provide readers with even a base for understanding what nature needs or what the efforts in a rewilding process are actually about.

Several times while reading, I found myself missing answers to specific questions. What does the Animal Welfare Act actually say, and which animals does it apply to? How do wild horses' lives compare to those of domesticated horses? If a report mentions that a foal has died - how common is it for foals to die from various causes (in other words, is there excess mortality among wild horses?)

In general, I'm missing the bigger picture - that is, as a reader, I'd like to know that there's a law promoting more wild nature, what role these animals play in conserving other species, and what the latest research says.

Discussion

That's as far as I got with my reading and interviews with sources.

But what does all this mean? Is it true, as the nature sources say, that the media's overall picture is skewed? And what's the next step?

I'll try to elaborate on that here.

First of all: Yes, there's some truth to the claim when four sources within the nature sector, each in their own way, complain about biased coverage of the nature projects they devote their working lives to. At least, if other nature projects resemble the conflict-ridden Molslaboratoriet.

If you look solely at the coverage of Mols, as a reader you'll be left with the impression that a majority is strongly opposed to rewilding and large animals behind fences in the wild.

But the opposition is not what it appears to be in the media coverage. In reality, it comes from a small minority, as several different surveys show.

In 2022, researchers at the University of Copenhagen asked 5,000 respondents about their views on rewilding and large animals in the wild.

A full 82 percent agreed that rewilded areas with large grazers would mean better living conditions for many animals, plants, and fungi species. Six percent disagreed. In the same survey, 60 percent believed that cattle and horses would thrive in such areas, while 24 percent said they didn't know, and 16 percent disagreed.

Half of the respondents would feel safe spending time in nature with large animals, but one in four would feel unsafe.

In 2022, another survey showed similar results. It was conducted for the Danish Society for Nature Conservation by Epinion, which surveyed 2,000 respondents.

71 percent of those surveyed said it is a good idea to preserve more wild nature in the form of Nature National Parks and untouched forests. Nine percent opposed the idea.

In 2025, 60 percent of participants in a survey conducted by the University of Copenhagen said they prefer forests with wild animals to those without. However, they would rather have animals such as red deer, bison, and moose than cattle and sheep. One in ten - 10 percent - does not want fences or cattle in the forests.

These surveys were conducted in the same years when opposition to rewilding with animals received massive media coverage. But the wishes of the majority are not given much attention. So the experts I interviewed were right: the coverage was skewed.

Furthermore, it is thought-provoking how nature's needs easily disappear from media coverage. Nature itself has no voice; it is drowned out by human conflicts and emotions.

Perhaps we've grown accustomed to the idea that nature isn't there and doesn't have a right of its own. Perhaps it's easy to say that you want nature, even if you don't understand what that actually entails. In any case, the media makes it seem as though it doesn't matter at all whether species survive, water bodies are restored, and wild nature is reestablished.

Does that mean, then, that we in the media shouldn't cover these conflicts? No, not in my opinion. But I think that articles focusing on conflict are one-sided and are given more attention than they deserve. If we in the media industry are to cover nature projects in a balanced way, we need to bring more nuance into the discussion, look for solutions, and involve a wide range of people in the debate.

Major media outlets would benefit from delving deeper into local conflicts, so that small local newsrooms aren't left to shoulder the entire burden of research.

Broadly speaking, activists are allowed to repeat the same accusations over and over, even when they prove to be unfounded. It would be akin to me, on Politiken's climate desk, writing only about the actions of the Extinction Rebellion activists and making that the entirety of our climate coverage. That, too, would be biased.

As I've been reading, it's occurred to me that we in the media industry sometimes get the "the little guy against the system" narrative all wrong. Of course, we must defend the vulnerable.

But when "the weak" have been allowed to dominate the agenda with accusations, police reports, and harassment, the question is whether they are truly "weak."

Both the Danish Society for Nature Conservation, Morten DD Hansen, and Else Østergaard Andersen from Thy National Park believe that the debate over Molslaboratoriet has led municipalities to abandon rewilding projects and animal keepers to give up their work with large grazers. Not because of factual arguments, but because of the entire emotionally charged debate.

Very few voices have been allowed to set an agenda that does not provide an accurate picture of the work being done with the animals and the people who work with them.

In other words, we in the media have a great responsibility. To the people involved, where conflicts are being exaggerated. To report in a nuanced and balanced way on the major changes taking place in our society. And to point the way toward solutions.

Perhaps this could encourage some of our news-fatigued fellow citizens to return to the media?

So what now?

To get readers to click on more nuanced and engaging journalism about nature and rewilding, we need to tap into emotions, fascination, and solutions.

This could result in exciting, captivating, and beautifully crafted journalism.

We could:

Describe nature projects with effective solutions - talk to locals, describe the problems at hand, and explain how they've been solved or can be solved. Follow up.

Ask people to share suggestions about their favorite natural places.

Take seriously the fact that people care deeply about animal welfare (especially that of horses). Create a comparison between the life of a wild horse and that of a domesticated horse.

Collect all the interesting stories that a nature guide shares on a tour through Molslaboratoriet or other areas of wild nature (e.g., carrion beetles that are "analyzed" by forensic scientists...)

Involve local stakeholders, not just the few who are the most vocal. And preferably before the conflict has fully escalated.

Involve activists in a non-confrontational way. Would it have made a difference if the criticism of the horses' conditions at Molslaboratoriet had been taken so seriously from the start that one of the activists had been given a tour with the veterinarian to explain how to tell if a wild horse is doing well, and then that dialogue had been covered? When we in the media allow emotionally charged criticism to be met with "bureaucratic jargon" or officialese, it often adds fuel to the fire in cases that end up as identity politics.

Write meta-stories about Danes' view of nature: where do we come from, and why do we view natural and cultural landscapes the way we do? Where are we headed, and why is that important?

Write critical stories about the bureaucracy that stands in the way when Danish landowners try to create nature - a good example could be Zetland's attempt to purchase land to be rewilded. This is investigative journalism and a personal journey of discovery all at once.

Fact Box: The quickfix

It doesn't have to be impossible, time-consuming - or boring - to improve coverage of nature projects.

For example, TV2 Østjylland introduced a comprehensive fact box that could be added to all articles, instantly making them more nuanced.

It requires a one-time effort involving thorough research, followed by some updates when new information is added, but it's manageable even for a small newsroom.

Sources

Instead of listing sources in footnotes within the text, I have chosen to compile the source references here at the end, so that reading the report itself is as effortless as possible.

Background

In the background section, I note that a large majority of the Danish Parliament at the time, in 2024, decided that 20 percent of Denmark's land area should be protected nature by 2030.

You can read more about this here: <https://lf.dk/viden-om/groen-trepart/faq-natur-og-biodiversitet/> and here: <https://oem.dk/nyheder/nyhedsarkiv/2024/juni/regeringen-og-parterne-i-groen-trepart-indgaar-historisk-aftale-om-et-groent-danmark/>

I also mention that a majority supports the creation of 21 Nature National Parks, where space will be set aside for nature with a high degree of biodiversity. You can read about that here: <https://mim.dk/miljoe/natur-og-biodiversitet/naturnationalparker>.

In the 2026 government platform, a target has been set for 30 percent of nature to be protected, with 10 percent of that area to be strictly protected, I write. Read more here: <https://stm.dk/statsministeriet/publikationer/det-politiske-grundlag-for-firkloeverregeringen/>

Species are struggling more and more, even in areas where they are supposed to be protected. Read more here: <https://politiken.dk/klima/art10578673/Danmarks-natur-er-g%C3%A5et-fra-elendig-til-endnu-v%C3%A6rre>.

The Danish Environmental Protection Agency reports that over the past 40 years, we have lost approximately three million birds in Denmark's open countryside. About 10 percent of our butterfly species have gone extinct since 1950. You can read about it here: <https://mim.dk/miljoe/natur-og-biodiversitet/naturen-paa-land>

Molslaboratoriet as a Case Study

You can read about Molslaboratoriet on their website: <https://naturfonden.dk/natur/rewilding-i-mols-bjerger/>

Pia Kærsgaard supports the critics: <https://www.information.dk/debat/2022/06/pia-kjaersgaard-rewilding-folket-boer-indroemme-saetter-biodiversitet-dyrevelfaerd>

Among other things, you can read about the 3,000 kr fine following an incident with a GPS collar in Zetland: <https://www.zetland.dk/historie/sHl1YK7G-a8yvV4M2-ed3d1>

Read about “User Needs” at Reuters here: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024/more-just-facts-how-news-audiences-think-about-user-needs> and on LinkedIn, where Dmitry Shishkin writes: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/ten-years-user-needs-media-knowing-your-audience-easy-dmitry-shishkin-bd9ee/>

In the section on the articles’ content, I cite Robert M. Entman’s “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm” from 1993: <https://fbaum.unc.edu/teaching/articles/J-Communication-1993-Entman.pdf>

Read about the rise in news avoidance at RUC: <https://ruc.dk/nyheder/ny-rapport-en-stigende-andel-af-danskere-undgaar-nyheder>

In “What the Codes Revealed,” I mention the article “Baron’s Land Purchased by a Fund: Today, the Neighbor Is Happy with the Outcome.” Read it here: <https://www.tv2ostjylland.dk/syddjurs/i-dag-er-nabo-lykkelig-over-resultatet-83d92>

Read about Nina Stork’s wild investment here: <https://borsen.dk/nyheder/pleasure/jordemoder-tjente-millioner-pa-livsvaerk-og-brugte-dem-pa-en-darlig-men-meningsfuld-forretning>

And here is the Ritzau article on the significance of ten years of rewilding at Molslaboratoriet: <https://www.berlingske.dk/danmark/studie-vilde-heste-og-kvaeg-i-mols-bjerger-skaber-mere-robust-natur>

TV2 Øst’s article about Dyreven regarding the horses in Mols Bjerger, which considers this to be highly objectionable, can be found here: <https://www.tv2ostjylland.dk/syddjurs/dyreven-om-heste-i-mols-bjerger-det-er-enormt-kritisabelt>

The article “Wild Horses Reported to the Police: ‘It’s Not a Free Life When We Put the Horses Behind a Barbed-Wire Fence’” is available here on BT: <https://www.bt.dk/samfund/vilde-heste-anmeldt-til-politiet-det-er-ikke-det-frie-liv-naar-vi-saetter-hestene-bag-et-pigtraadshegn>

And here is BT’s “Animal Activists Prepare for a Protest: ‘We Won’t Stand by and Watch Starving Animals Winter After Winter’”: <https://www.bt.dk/samfund/dyreaktivist-er-klar-til-demonstration-vil-ikke-se-paa-udsultede-dyr-vinter-efter-vinter>

The article about activists feeding the wild horses is here: <https://www.tv2ostjylland.dk/syddjurs/aktivister-fodrer-de-vilde-heste-nu-staar-en-af-dem-frem>.

The one about Per, who’s giving up on 112 and going all in on animal welfare, is here: <https://www.tv2ostjylland.dk/syddjurs/per-dropper-112-og-gaar-all-in-paa-dyrevelfaerd>

The biologist who was reported to the police responds to critics here, stating that it is not our goal for the animals to survive here: <https://www.tv2ostjylland.dk/tv2dk/politianmeldt-biolog-svarer-kritikere-igen-det-er-ikke-vores-maal-at-dyrene-skal-overleve>

The article about Zenia Stampe's attempt to draw attention to the harassment of employees, which ends up placing neglect in the headline here: <https://www.tv2ostjylland.dk/syddjurs/nu-vil-hun-have-svar-fra-ministeren-uholdbart-at-sag-om-vanroegt-fortsætter>

You can read about the clothing brand caught in a shitstorm here: <https://www.tv2ostjylland.dk/tv-midtvest/toejmaerke-i-shitstorm-beskyldes-for-vanroegt-af-dyr> and here: <https://www.tv2ostjylland.dk/tv-midtvest/toejmaerke-havnede-i-shitstorm-numer-stemningen-vendt>

You can find the article "Dispute Drains Resources at the police: An Absolutely Insane Number of Hours" in the "Update me" section here: <https://www.tv2ostjylland.dk/syddjurs/strid-suger-ressourcer-hos-politiet-et-helt-vanvittigt-timetal>

Other sources can be found in Retriever/Informedia.

Discussion

In 2022, researchers surveyed 5,000 respondents about their attitudes toward rewilding and large animals in the wild: https://curis.ku.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/323286004/Befolkningens_syn_p_naturnationalparker_web_OK.pdf

71 percent of those surveyed said it is a good idea to preserve more wild nature in the form of Nature National Parks and untouched forests. Nine percent opposed the idea. According to an Epion survey by the Danish Society for Nature Conservation: <https://via.ritzau.dk/pressemeddelelse/13643330/trods-kritik-maling-viser-kaempe-opbakning-til-naturnationalparker?publisherId=13559520>

In 2025, 60 percent of participants in a study conducted by the University of Copenhagen said they prefer forests with wild animals to those without: https://nyheder.ku.dk/alle_nyheder/2025/11/vilde-dyr-splitter-danskerne--men-de-fleste-siger-ja-tak-til-kronhjorte-og-hegn/