



**Avalanche** (arctic fox)

# HOWL CHRONICLES

The Wolf Mountain Nature Center

February 2024

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TheWolfMountainNatureCenter.org

(a non-profit 501(c)3 organization)  
Founded in 2006 by Will Pryor

## *Head Animal Caretaker's Message...Will Pryor*

I have danced with winter spirits many times and I'm an ok dancer compared to them. However, this winter I just cannot seem to get with the beat. There are indeed changes in the wind.

When you spend most of your daylight hours outdoors (and have a solar cabin) you tend to notice changes more than the subway traveling folks. Rains more than snows here now and the ice! Not much of an ice dancer.

This change is happening quickly and I think about how these changes are affecting all living things and their seasonal dances. There certainly is still enough snow to keep all our northern animals happy including the arctic foxes, arctic wolves, and me.

Observing and interacting with the four arctic "teenage" wolves this past week playing in the snow sent me back in time to when I was a much shorter person. Even then I was outdoors in all weather and when my mother would call

me to "Come in, it's too cold out there Willie," I would do all I could to delay going back inside. So, I identify with these hardy outdoor animals 100%. But, like our older wolves, I do appreciate my shelter and woodstove to warm the frozen fingers with a cup of joe or hot cocoa. The question I'm asked often this time of year is "What plans do you have for this year?" Many improvements and additions to animal habitats. More raised platforms and water enrichments. We are building a new fox enclosure and continue to work towards completing a brand-new wolf habitat area.

As I check in with each animal daily on my rounds, I am pleased to note how well all are doing. The old ones amaze me with their athletic abilities. Just this morning Tashina, soon to be 16, was racing around like a three-year-old. Cayuga, almost 13, is moving well, howling, and healthy.

Gosh I hope I can be able to move like them when I'm 108 years old!

So, as the breeding season hormones are kicking in with many of the animals, I observe behaviors and decide if maybe today I will not intrude in their world, but grant them some space and let them be wolves, coyotes, and foxes. After all, it is not about me, rather what is best for them. If you listen carefully to what they say, you will hear. It is they who are the teachers and we the students. I am so very glad to be a part of all of this and am looking forward to the next dance.

Walk in balance.  
Will



# The Great Backyard Bird Count

February 16-19, 2024



The [Great Backyard Bird Count](#) (GBBC) is an annual citizen science project where people from all over the world come together to watch and count winter birds to help scientists better understand global bird populations prior to their spring migrations. This survey takes place during four days each February, this year the GBBC just happens to fall on **The Wolf Mountain Nature Center's** reopening weekend. We want to encourage each of you to participate in global conservation efforts, so bring your binoculars and join us on **Sunday, February 18<sup>th</sup>**.



Alex Gross



Rose Pass

### How to Participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count:

- When: February 16–19, 2024
- Where: Your yard, favorite parks, **Wolf Mountain on Sunday the 18<sup>th</sup>!**
- Time: **Minimum of 15 minutes** on one day, or longer all 4 days
- Equipment: Binoculars, the *Merlin Bird app*, the *ebird app*.
- How: ID birds by sight or sound.

### How Anyone Can Identify Birds Regardless of Skill:

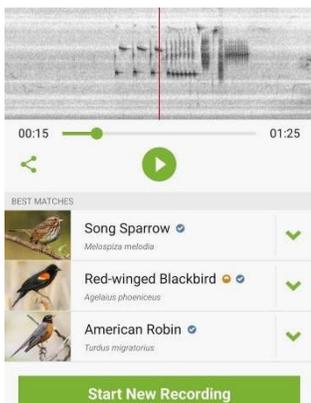
If you aren't a confident birder, have no fear, there's an app for that! **The Merlin Bird App** has three features to help you. When you can properly confirm the ID of the bird, the Merlin Bird App will automatically submit your observations to GBBC.

Merlin has an excellent **Step-by-Step ID** feature that asks questions about your location, the size of the bird, the main colors you saw, and what the bird was doing when you saw it. Once you have followed all the prompts, Merlin will provide a list of species that meet that description. Just select the species from the menu and submit the observation.



Merlin also has a great **Photo ID** option as well. For example, if I upload this picture taken by Peggy, our Head Fox Caretaker, Merlin will generate a list of possible species.

continued on next page



Personally, I think the coolest and most exciting feature of the Merlin Bird App is the **Sound ID** feature. Read more on the next page!

Bird songs and calls can be a challenge to learn, Merlin makes this accessible to everyone! Surveys of sound often provide a much more detailed account of birds in a given area, as it can sometimes tough to sight a bird in dense canopies; where a picture can be worth a thousand words, a sound survey can be worth a thousand pictures. Simply start the sound recording feature and if your mic can pick up a bird, Merlin can ID it! Here’s a link to an instructional video that will help you learn how to use this feature: [Merlin Bird ID app now identifies bird sounds \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

How to Record Numbers of Birds in ebird:

If you are an experienced birder and would like to count numbers of birds, you can enter your observational data in the **ebird** app and ebird will submit that data to the GBBC. The mobile app has amazing capabilities, but if you don’t enjoy using your phone for this purpose, there is also a desktop version on the website where you can enter your hand-written observations. Here’s another link to an instructional video that explains all about the ebird data entry: [Submit Your Sightings on eBird Mobile - eBird Essentials \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Whether you decide to observe birds at your feeders from the comfort of your own home, or would like to observe birds while visiting Wolf Mountain, we hope that you will take this opportunity to celebrate our avian community! Please enjoy some pictures previously captured by our staff at The Wolf Mountain Nature Center.

Science is fun, play in nature!

- **Erin Lord-Astles. Director**



Erin Lord-Astles  
Bird Banding, FLCC



Alex Gross



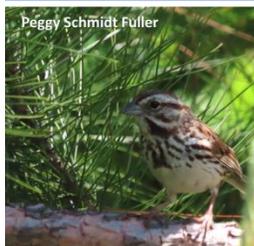
Alex Gross



Alex Gross



Alex Gross



Peggy Schmidt Fuller



Rose Pass



Rose Pass



Alex Gross

# Summer Interns Needed!

**Karley Bush, Intern Coordinator**

With the approach of winter's end, it is time to announce the opening of applications for our 2024 Summer Internship. Though it seems we are far removed from the warm days that mark the beginning of Summer, and our busy season at Wolf Mountain, they will be here before we know it!



Our Summer Intern position offers a general experience of what operating a licensed animal facility encompasses. This includes hands-on and classroom/field instruction to acquire skills in captive wildlife husbandry, observation and documentation of animal behaviors, public relations, and basic non-profit office management. The schedule for summer interns begins the last week of May for 10 weeks with one mandatory 3-hour training on a Sunday in early May (tbd) for paperwork, however past interns have begun sooner or stayed later in the season based on their desires.

Past projects our interns have worked on include: creating animal enrichment programs, monitoring trail cameras for "captures", pond macroinvertebrate surveys, various species site surveys, monitoring interactions between wolves and ravens, and behavioral observations at different stages of pup development. When off-duty, past interns have been known to spend time enjoying the nature trails at the center or exploring local parks and trails nearby.



For our internship there are large public speaking, public education, and physical labor components. We also have the potential for limited housing to be offered this upcoming season. All details for the application can be found on our website under the Volunteer/Intern tab, and we begin reviewing completed applications February 1st as they are received. Candidates should be currently enrolled in a college program such as biology, pre-veterinarian, wildlife management, environmental conservation, or other related course of study. While we offer both part- and full-time programs, preference will be given to full time (32+ hours/week) applicants.

"Thanks for a fun & educational experience. I really enjoyed every day I was here!" -JP



"Thank you for these magical two months!" -AG



"One of the things that really stood out to me from the start is how you made sure I was doing things I was interested in & adjusting things around when needed." -RP



# Foxes

Peg Fuller, Head Fox Care Specialist

## Arctic Foxes Have Fun in Freezing Temperatures

Winter in Chenango County can have some very cold temperatures. Single digits and below zero with the wind-chill is common. Many of us hurry from inside to the car to back inside if we go outside at all. Many of the animals at Wolf Mountain Nature Center enjoy the inside of their shelters with fresh hay to stay cozy and warm when winter weather gets harsh. Not the Arctic Foxes! When it is snowing and the high winds kick up the snow squalls, we find Avalanche and Aurora facing the wind and snow with a smile on their faces. Games of chase are not hindered by blowing snow and freezing temperatures. They have been observed curled up, sleeping soundly, on blocks of ice. They are enjoying winter. It appears to be their favorite time of the year.



In the winter the arctic foxes live a solitary life, so there is no curling up together to stay warm, but their little bodies are adapted for cold weather in the winter. The fox's entire body is designed for staying warm and survival. The short noses, legs, ears, and legs allow the body to conserve energy.

Scientists believe the winter coat of arctic foxes is the warmest, most insulating, fur of any animal. It is approximately 2 to 2 ½ inches thicker in the winter. The undercoat is the thick part of the fur and the longer guard hairs are the outer thinner strands. During the summer months, the heavy undercoat is shed out and the foxes are left with a very thin grayish-black coat. In the winter, snow, ice, and rain will not permeate to the fox's skin because the coat is so dense. They also have fur on the bottom of their feet which provides additional protection and insulation as well as providing traction on ice. Their bushy tails are about 12 inches long and, in the winter, it can be used as a mattress curled up under them or as a blanket wrapped around their bodies and a place to stick their noses while they sleep.

Arctic Foxes have a counter-current heat exchange system. Their veins and arteries are very close to each other. This allows for self-warming of the blood as it circulates in the body without the requirement of warming in the heart. Another incredible adaptation in the arctic foxes is their body fat. Their body fat also changes from about 6 % body fat in summer and 30% body fat in winter. The higher fat percentage in the winter gives them extra insulation and helps them to stay warm. Studies have been done showing they can eat the same amount of food in the winter and summer and their body fat still changes from summer to winter. Based on the outside elements, their body automatically can change the metabolism rate and their body temperatures.

Having long claws allows them to grip the ice so they can continue their games of chase, digging holes, burying food, and playing in their winter wonderland. Ah, to be an arctic fox on a below zero winter day.



Aurora



Avalanche & Aurora



Snowflake

# Coyotes

Dave Conner, Head Coyote Care Specialist

It is not unusual to have more coyote sightings in the winter. Do not panic—just keep a respectful distance and enjoy watching such wonderful creatures.

1. In winter months foliage has fallen off the trees and the brown dead leaves are covered with snow making it easier to spot coyotes as they move about.
2. Smaller game such as mice, mole, snakes, insects, fruits, and vegetables are harder to find or not available in the winter. Therefore, coyotes must hunt over larger distances to catch rabbits, fawns, and occasionally will form packs to take down full grown deer—a behavior very unlike their normal solitary hunting habits.
3. Male coyotes born the previous spring are leaving their family home and traveling large distances attempting to find a mate, start their own family, and claim their own territory.
4. When snow is deep, coyotes conserve energy by using snowmobile trails, hiking trails, and old logging roads while hunting for food.
5. Coyotes will occasionally use abandoned buildings such as old barns, sheds, or houses for shelters to live in. When food becomes scarce, coyotes might move into urban areas looking for food in garbage cans and garages.
6. It is not uncommon to see a coyote on top of a downed tree, stump, rockpile, or sitting on a hill top to get a better view of prey when snow is deep



## If you see a coyote...

Niki Cesar Tracchia, Wildlife Advocate

It's now mating season for coyotes, and pups will be born in spring. You will see coyotes more frequently, and this means during the daylight too. Coyotes are crepuscular/diurnal animals; this means they are most active in the hours before and after dusk and dawn, but may also be out during the day. Coyotes in daylight DOES NOT mean they are sick or dangerous!

☀️ If you see what you think may be sick or orphaned wildlife:

-DO call a wildlife rehabilitator or the environmental police and talk to an expert for further steps.

-DO NOT interfere with the animal until you have contacted a professional about the situation and interference has been recommended (most of the time it won't be).

-DO NOT cause panic on social media by posting about it.

☀️ PET OWNERS:

- If you leave your pet unsupervised, you are willingly accepting that it may be injured or killed by CARS - the number one killer of domestic pets left outdoors.

As well as injured or killed by our NATIVE predatory WILDLIFE, and or diseases.

- Your DOMESTIC PET is not wild, and it should be supervised at all times. Yes, this means your "outdoor" cat as well. Cats are a non-native species, and kill 1.3–4.0 billion birds and 6.3–22.3 billion mammals annually.

- If you keep your pet inside, this ensures 100% safety from wildlife encounters.

☀️ TO KEEP COYOTES WILD:

- If you see a coyote, make loud noises to scare it, this ensures it does not habituate to people. This is called coyote hazing.

- DO NOT FEED THEM. This goes for all wildlife!

🐾 Coyotes belong here and help to maintain a balanced environment for all.



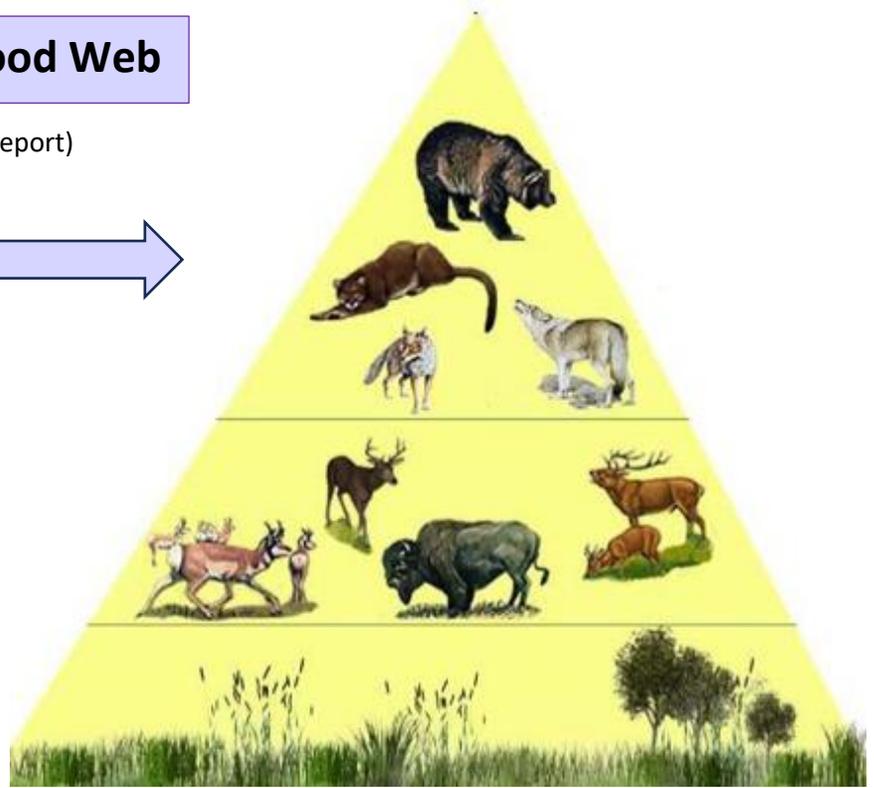
# For our junior biologists...

## Trophic Pyramid vs Food Web

(graphics from a student's report)

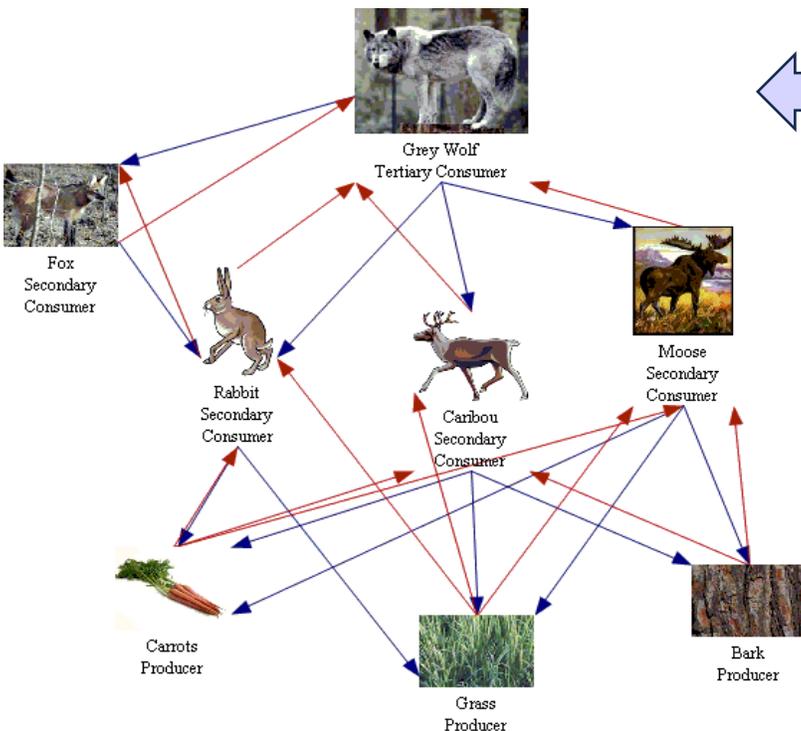
The trophic pyramid is a representation that shows the biomass or biomass productivity at each level in the system.

Biomass is organic materials that contain stored energy from the sun.



The food web is a system of interlocking and interdependent food chains.

Grey wolves mostly eat large hoofed animals, such as moose, deer and elk. If those are hard to find they will eat smaller animals such as rabbits and beavers.



**Blue arrows** show what an animal eats (wolf eats fox), while **red arrows** indicate what gets eaten (carrots get eaten by rabbit)

The absence of any organism in the web will cause the entire system to become out of balance, potentially resulting in the death of any or all of the others.

by Alex Gross, Caretaker Assistant & Aspiring Conservation Biologist

In mid-February us humans celebrate Valentine's Day, where we express our love, affection, and devotion to our partners. Believe it or not, wolves do not celebrate Valentine's Day, yet February marks an important month for them, as breeding season begins. The inception of the February breeding season brings a plethora of changes to wolves, ranging from behavioral, hormonal, and more.

First off, it is important to note that the mating system for gray wolves is classified as *monogamous*, meaning that a dominant male-female pair control most of the breeding activity within the pack during a breeding season. There are certainly exceptions that have been observed, such as *polygyny* (dominant male mating with the dominant female and subordinate females within the pack), *polyandry* (a single female mating with multiple males), and *polygynandry* (where multiple males and females have multiple breeding partners). These exceptions can sometimes result in *plural breeding* (when multiple litters are produced with the same pack). These are exceptions however, as monogamy is the common mating system seen (it is worth noting that we see these exceptions more often in larger wolf packs).



February breeding season is the most aggressive time of the year for wolves. Simultaneously, male testosterone and female estrogen levels spike and peak. Female gray wolves ovulate only once a year with receptivity lasting around a week or two, which contrasts domestic dogs where females ovulate twice a year and males produce sperm year-round. With limited opportunities to breed and such a short window to do so, aggression within packs reaches a high. As mentioned above, normally a dominant male and female pair control the breeding activity within a pack. If you are a subordinate wolf, and many of your packmates are relatives (there is strong inbreeding avoidance within wolf packs), the

best opportunity to breed may not be within the pack you were born into, also called the natal pack. As such, this is when you see more dispersal attempts. Subordinates without a clear path to reproductive success will leave their packs in search for an unrelated, opposite sexed individual with the same goal in mind, or an already existing group of wolves with an open breeding position (note that a dispersal is only successful when the wolf permanently settles in a new pack or starts its own pack). This is where the *lone wolf* term comes from, as individuals fend for themselves while exploring breeding opportunities. If these forays in search of a mate are unsuccessful, they will likely just rejoin the pack they originally left. This classic pairing of unrelated lone wolves to form a new pack is the common pattern of pack formation in most wolf populations. However, in the iconic northern Yellowstone wolf population, individuals are more likely to attempt a dispersal in same sexed groups (called *group dispersal*, i.e., at least two wolves leaving their pack together and join with unrelated wolves from another pack). This pattern of group dispersal seen commonly in the northern range of Yellowstone presents a low-risk strategy to seeking out breeding opportunities in a landscape with higher wolf densities not seen in other populations.





Once the hoopla of breeding season ends, the priority for wolf packs is getting ready for pups. Gestation is anywhere between 60-65 days, and in this period, the focus shifts towards establishing a den site. This is arguably the most important decision a breeding female will make in the whole year, as this will be the center of activity for the pack for months to come. As such, location is important, as the den cannot be located too close to rival packs, but also must be a close enough distance away from a consistent source of prey. Timing is also

an important factor. A pack that settles at a den site while neighboring rival packs are still searching is more susceptible to attacks, putting pups and pack mates at risk. As such, a lot goes into den selection that can make or break pup survival for wolves.

All these changes are fascinating, as dynamics between individuals change quickly. While most of our wolves at the Center are spay/neutered, they undergo these hormonal and behavioral changes as well, which gives volunteers and visitors the potential opportunity to see these dynamics in person! As a side note to wrap this up, we are fast approaching the breeding season for many species in New York State. As such, when out in nature, be mindful to avoid species who are prepping for offspring and leave their dens alone if you find them!



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**Wishes and Wants: As a non-profit we rely heavily on donations. Below are some of the many items that would help the center. If you can help, please contact us or simply bring the item(s) on your next visit!**

Though it is still winter here on the hill, we will soon be busy with landscaping and construction/maintenance type tasks. Having certain skills in these areas is helpful, but not required as we will train you as most tasks are fairly simple to master. Please contact us 607-627-6784 or [twmncwolves@yahoo.com](mailto:twmncwolves@yahoo.com) if you, your family, your work place, etc would like to sign up to help! Work days occur both weekdays and weekends. Please note all workers must be at least 16 years old. Thanks in advance!

- Animal Care**
- Metal "pooper-scoopers"
  - Old fire hoses (minus the nozzles)
  - 6' round/oval galvanized water troughs
  - Commercial grade garden hose (3/4")
  - Gift Cards: Tractor Supply/Country Max
  - Gift Cards: Chewy.com

- Office/Classroom**
- Toilet Paper
  - Paper Towels
  - Hand Sanitizer
  - Non-latex gloves (large/XL)
  - Heavy Duty Staple Guns
  - AA batteries

- Landscaping/Maintenance**
- Picnic tables &/or benches
  - Gift Cards: Lowe's/Curtis Lumber
  - Working push mower
  - Various power drill bits
  - Contractor size trash bags
  - Salt/sand spreader for pickup truck
  - Use of bulldozer

## Open Hours and Admission Rates

\*Last admission is 30 minutes prior to closing time.

	Sundays	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fridays	Saturdays
Regular Season September 1 – June 30 (closed in January)	Open 12 – 4 pm Various animal enrichment programs; Guided Tours at 12:30	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Summer Season July 1 – August 31	Open 12 – 4 pm Various animal enrichment programs; Guided Tours at 12:30	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Open 12 – 3 pm Various animal enrichment programs; Self-Guided Tours	Open 12 – 3 pm Various animal enrichment programs; Self-Guided Tours

**Regular Admission: ages 6 and up: \$8/person; kids 5 and under free**

(Please note special events/programs may have different admission fees applied)

**We will reopen on Sundays beginning on Sunday, February 18, 2024  
(weather pending; closings will be posted on website, Facebook, and voicemail)**

## Upcoming Special Programs

### Photography Sessions of Wolves

Saturday, Feb. 17 or Saturday, Mar. 23

10 am – 12 pm

\$100 pre-registration required via website

Includes use of our two photography platforms where participants can take pictures of the wolves without fencing obstructing views. Also includes guided tour of rest of Center. Limit of 10 participants per session. Held rain, sun, or snow!

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Did you know...we are inspected, regulated, and licensed by both the USDA and the DEC!  
But funding and support comes from YOU! Donate at:  
<https://www.thewolfmountainnaturecenter.org/donatesponsor.html>  
We are registered with NYS Charities (reg # 49-06-68). EIN #20-5274163



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

