



Tala

Ahhh...green grass and watermelon!

HOWL CHRONICLES

The Wolf Mountain Nature Center

August 2021

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(a non-profit 501(c)3 organization)

Founded in 2006 by Will Pryor

Head Animal Caretaker's Message...Will Pryor

Reflections from the Mountain...

As another summer thunderstorm rolls by Wolf Mountain, I am reminded of a John Denver song with the lyrics "there's a storm across the valley..."

This has indeed been a summer of rain and it is evident in the stature of all green growing things. If I look out over the grounds and close my eyes to imagine a winter scene, then open my eyes again, I see a green jungle—quite the opposite!

After battling a serious health issue this year, I have become even more reflective about the meaning of life. As many of our animals grow older and move on, I am humbled to simply be a part of this incredible story and gift of waking up each morning.

So, that being said, major renovations have been going on with our fox areas and the goal is to have all completed by October 1st. The two new Arctic fox kits will move into the larger space, providing them more room for running, climbing, pouncing, and playing. The older foxes now have a larger airlock space for easier access and veterinary checks.

The wolves have had a great time living in the lush green "jungle" of their habitats thanks to Mother Nature's frequent rains this season. The taller grass and shrubs provide additional cover and lots of hiding places to cache food.

I am forever grateful to all my volunteers and interns who helped out this summer, especially our four interns who picked up the

slack when needed and were fabulous tour guides. Read more about them later in this newsletter.

So as the goldenrod blooms and our last summer campout rolls around, the songs and laughter by the campfire announce that seasonal changes are coming, and I am moved to tears to be a part of it all.

Walk in balance upon Mother Earth. Ah ho!

Will





critter capers



The focus this quarter is on our Arctic Fox Kits! This past spring, we were able to secure a male, Avalanche, and an unrelated female, Aurora Borealis to add to our education programs (and to replace the vacancy left when Yana and Yukon passed away last year.)

Fascinating creatures, Arctic fox belong to the canid family yet exhibit many cat-like qualities as well. Though not officially listed as endangered, many Arctic animals are in fact heading that way as climate changes and global warming trends threaten their habitats.



Melting ice caps and glaciers and rising sea levels mean less land available for their homes. As humans destroy more natural

habitats, expand roads, build more homes and malls, and move further into wild animal terrains, and as disasters such as wildfires spread, all of our natural wildlife becomes threatened and lose their resources for survival. Part of our mission at

Wolf Mountain Nature Center is to educate visitors, increase awareness, and perhaps ignite some positive action in protecting our precious gifts from Mother Earth. Yes, people like Jeff Bezos can ride spaceships and NASA can explore other planets, but let's face it folks—this Earth we call home may well be our only chance for survival—she needs care, repair, and love!

Like many wild animals, Arctic fox are born in late spring and must mature quickly and learn skills necessary to be ready to survive the upcoming harsh winter season which in the Arctic can last many months! Avalanche and Aurora switched from formula to ground meats such as burger and venison by one month of age. Caretakers spend several hours each day with the kits to socialize with them and develop trust. As with all our animals, staff must be able to safely enter



enclosures for cleanups, habitat improvement work, and veterinary care. Our animals need to feel safe and comfortable with us as well.

Once the kits reached two months of age, fox Caretakers began "training" exercises.

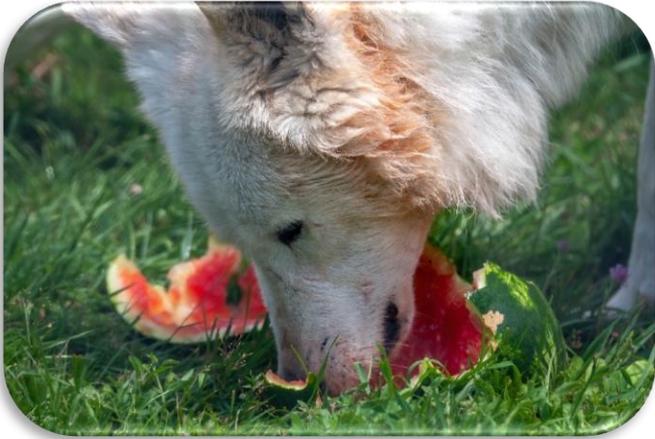
The word training is in quotes because we are not teaching the kits anything new, rather we are encouraging them to initiate instinctive behaviors. In other words, we are acting as surrogate parents to teach the fox how to hunt. If you have ever seen a documentary of foxes, you know they jump high into the air and pounce down onto

their prey (with snow foxes all you end up seeing are little white bums and tails sticking out of the snow.) To encourage the kits to do their "mouse pounce" we use a mini trampoline as the pouncing platform. A stick

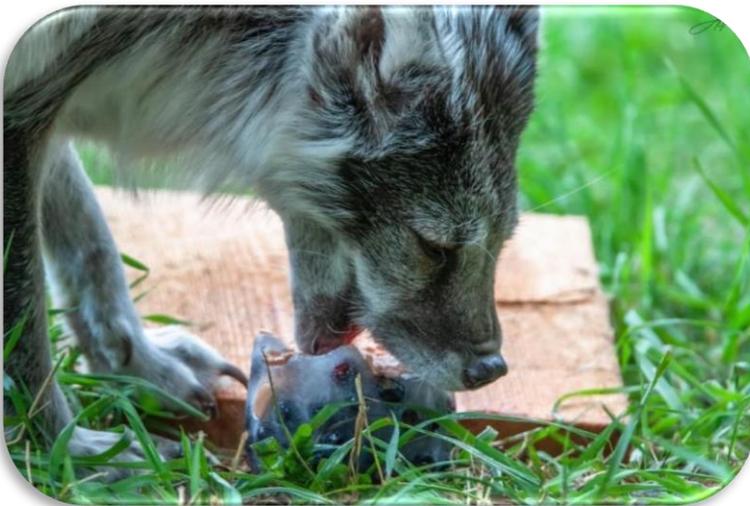
or other object is used to "scratch" underneath to imitate the sounds a mouse or lemming might make beneath the snow. In response, the foxes tilt their heads to listen carefully, then usually will pounce on the trampoline. A successful pounce is immediately rewarded with a highly coveted treat such as a chunk of venison steak! Aurora has mastered this pounce; Avalanche on the other hand likes to assume the role of mouse and goes under the trampoline to scratch while Aurora pounces at him. Adorable little foxes!



Wolves & Watermelons



On July 25th, our wolves and coyotes were treated to watermelons stuffed with hotdogs, cheese, and hard-boiled eggs, whereas the Arctic foxes got blueberry and hotdog “foxcicles” to keep them cool. Due to the high sugar content of watermelon, most of the inside was scooped out and substituted with more canid friendly goodies. Events like this provide great enrichment for the animals: it encourages them to work harder to get their food (after all, hunting, chasing, & capturing are typical activities done in the wild), and it introduces new tastes and textures for the animals to explore. In addition, the cooler foods help provide comfort from the hot temperatures of summer.



Director Dialog...Erin Lord-Astles

This previous July, The Wolf Mountain Nature Center (TWMNC) was invited to present a program for the Sherburne Library's "Tales and Tails" summer reading program. Two of this summer's interns, Ben and Alex, did a fantastic job reading **The Good Little Wolf by A.H. Benjamin** to the kids. This book cleverly highlights that classics like The Three Little Pigs and Little Red Riding Hood are negative old-world mythology and that most human/wolf conflict is a result of superstition, misunderstanding, and fear. The kids then drew positive pictures of good little



wolves to help dispel remaining antipredator sentiments. During the program, Ben and Alex explained the history of persecution of wolves and other predators in this country, particularly in the northeast. We then asked the kids if they could think of any current local examples of antipredator attitudes and were pleased when they immediately offered up the eastern coyote.

Many people know that wolves were once the top apex predator in New York State (NYS) and that they were eliminated by European colonists via hunting, trapping and poisoning campaigns. The last known population in NYS was documented in 1890. Fewer people are aware that the deforestation of our landscape and elimination of our native apex predators actually created opportunities for smaller mesopredators like the coyote to colonize the landscape and fill the vacancy as top dog. Eastern coyotes became firmly established in NYS by the 1940s.



It is common for our staff to encounter people who romanticize wolves, now that they are no longer a competitor in our region, and to react to coyotes with disdain and revulsion. Here at TWMNC, our staff educates the community on the ecological role and intrinsic value of eastern coyotes. Visitors are often surprised to learn that as western coyotes moved east, they actually hybridized with the last remnants of eastern wolves, creating the eastern coyote subspecies we enjoy today.

The antipredator sentiments people have about coyotes today mirrors that of the attitudes towards our native predators in the past and is a prime example of a phenomena called **Cultural Carrying Capacity**. We all know ecological carrying capacity is the term used to describe how many animals of a given species sustainably can occupy a given space (for example: how many deer should be harvested to avoid over-browse damage on the landscape). Cultural carrying capacity is the number of animals humans will allow in an area before we want to eliminate them out of fear of predation or competition. Historically, the cultural carrying capacity for any predator species in this region is unfortunately very low. The answer to this is simple: re-education.

Classic tales of the Big Bad Wolf were designed to create fear in European children, as a means to keep them from wandering off into the woods alone. To this day, you still see a lot of negative imagery around wolves and coyotes on TV. All of these propagandized stories only further reduce our cultural carrying capacity for the predators needed to maintain healthy ecosystems. As a licensed exhibition and education facility, TWMNC's mission is to dispel all these old-world misconceptions, superstitions, and antipredator attitudes to create a world where humans and animals can peacefully coexist.



Summer Interns



Each summer we welcome college students who are pursuing their studies in such areas as wildlife management, conservation biology, pre-veterinary medicine, and outdoor education. These interns learn the myriad of skills required to manage and operate an outdoor animal preserve and nature center. Everything from animal care, fence and structure construction, habitat improvements, development of animal enrichment activities, landscaping, and public education are all part of their daily routines while working at the Center.

Kaitlyn Kuzara, a Senior at Niagara University majoring in Psychology, may be a small person, but she is one tough lady! Interested in studying animal behaviors and the causes of those behaviors, Kaitlyn spent hours observing, documenting, and then analyzing the interactions of the wolves. She then created a fascinating PowerPoint presentation comparing behaviors of a child in foster care to that of our “rescue” wolf who had three different homes before moving to Wolf Mountain at a year old.

Benjamin Beebe, a Senior Wildlife Conservation major from Kansas State University and retired from the military, is a workaholic! He was instrumental in running heavy machinery to widen our driveway and make improvements. He volunteered to extend his hours in order to take on the responsibility of early morning feedings of the fox kits. A very easy-going guy, Ben makes folks feel at ease as he leads educational tours around the Center. To motivate youngsters to listen and pay attention, Ben often rewarded them with stuffed wolves! His special project while at Wolf Mountain was to study our numerous ravens: he was able to locate one of their nesting sites, recorded their calls and left all sorts of “fragrant” smelling scraps to lure the birds into trail cam locales for photographs.



Summer Interns (continued)

A Senior Biology major with a concentration in Conservation Biology and Ecology at SUNY Oneonta, Alex Gross is a super dedicated guy! Putting in over 360 hours during his summer internship, Alex frequently continued his research and scientific analyses at home after working a full day on site.

His special project was an experiment with fladry to discover its effectiveness in reducing livestock depredation.

Like Ben, Alex loved to lead tours and was always disappointed if his group wasn't HUGE in numbers! While here, Alex put together numerous very professionally done educational scientific posters to help educate the public (and us!) and he now runs our Instagram page. Since his college is only an hour from Wolf Mountain, He plans on returning frequently to score that tour of 100 visitors! Alex's passion is African Wild Dogs and he is anticipating going to Africa next summer to study his favorite canid.



Shenequa Perry is a Senior at SUNY ESF (environmental science and forestry) majoring in Environmental Biology. Shen has been an Assistant Caretaker at Wolf Mountain for several years but needed to complete some field work so naturally Wolf Mountain became the obvious choice! Shen is another of our sweet but tough girls. She was foreperson for a relatively large animal containment fence project, operates heavy machinery with ease and when it comes to manual labor she works circles around the guys! Shenequa assisted with raising and caring for the two Arctic fox kits as part of her duties. Her field work included observing, identifying, and cataloguing over 100 indigenous birds, plants, and fungi, but her favorite by far is the 'shrooms!

**15th annual celebration & fundraiser
Honoring the Spirit of the Wolf
Sunday, October 10, 2021
11 am – 4 pm**



- fill pumpkins for the animals
- Sled Dogs of Smokey Hill
 - food vendors
- Native American crafts
 - Jim Okey, magician
 - nature trails
 - gift shop
 - & more!

admission only \$8/person; kids 5 & under free
only cash accepted in admissions & gift shop

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!

Animal Care
 Metal rakes/shovels
 Metal "pooper-scoopers"
 Walleye scoop net
 Old fire hoses
 6' round/oval galvanized water troughs
 No-climb horse fence (4' or 6' height)
 Commercial grade garden hose (3/4")

Landscaping/Maintenance
 Picnic tables & benches
 Solar lights (for pathways)
 Wheelbarrow (heavy duty)
 Solar-operated fountain
 Exterior screws (2.5-3" size)
 Lag construction screws (3-4" size)
 Working push mower

Office/Classroom
 Postage stamps
 AA batteries
 Brown paper lunch bags
 30 or 55-gallon garbage bags
 Toilet Paper
 Baby wipes
 Non-latex gloves (large/XL)

Can you help? Many of these jobs are "one & done" tasks that can be completed in a single day!

Skills/Services
(we provide the materials-you provide the service!)
 Construction of wooden fence using 2 x 4's
 Outdoor painting of fences
 Solar panel hookup
 Construction of small wooden landing & stairs
 Holes dug for 10 fence posts

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; Self or Guided Tours at 12:30 and 2:00 pm | Closed | Closed | Closed | Closed | Closed | Closed |
| Summer Season July 1 – August 31 | Open 12 – 4 pm Various animal enrichment programs; Self or Guided Tours at 12:30 and 2:00 pm | 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 |
| Admission | Children 5 & under Free Folks 6 & up \$8.00 | Closed | Closed | Closed | Closed | Children 5 & under Free Folks 6 & up \$8.00 | Children 5 & under Free Folks 6 & up \$8.00 |

2021 Special Programs

Wolf Communication Program (Howl Night)

Learn the variety of methods used by wolves to communicate including scent marking, body language, and vocalizations. Understand why wolves howl and the distinct types of messages behind each howl. We finish with a pack howl!

August 21 7pm – dark
September 18 5pm – dark
October 16 4pm - dark

All Howl Programs are held on Saturday evenings and include tours of all wolf & coyote exhibits.

(Please note that our Arctic Fox exhibits are closed during this program.) This is a group tour/lecture—visitors are expected to remain with the group at all times.

Admission is \$8.00 per person
(5 and under are free)



Please Note:

Due to Covid-19 and ever-changing mandates & regulations, any or all of our planned events/activities may be abruptly cancelled or postponed. We apologize in advance if this happens, but it is out of our control. Certainly, we will abide by rules passed down and want everyone to stay as safe as possible. If you have pre-paid for an activity that is cancelled due to federal or local mandates, we will offer you one of the following options: refund, credit toward a future event, credit toward merchandise at our gift shop, or accept your money as a donation to be used for animal care expenses.

We appreciate your understanding.

Spirit of the Wolf 15th annual festival

**Sunday, October 10
11-4 pm**

Annual fundraiser with special programs, vendors, food, and of course pumpkins! Fill pumpkins with wolf treats and watch as Caretakers deliver the pumpkins to the hungry wolves! More details added on the website as date approaches.

**Admission: \$8/person;
kids 5 & under free**

