



**Nipahwi**  
(7 year old tundra wolf)

# HOWL CHRONICLES

The Wolf Mountain Nature Center

May 2022

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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...

Last week I actually was able to work outdoors in a t-shirt for two whole days which was lovely! A few days later, over 20" of snow fell which caused power outages and many broken branches. As I write this, snowflakes continue to be blown around by the wind spirits. Weather and even life itself are subject to change without notice, so I have learned to be grateful for every snowflake and each new day.

More work has been done on the Wolf Walkway and with increased sunshine and nicer work days ahead, the goal is to have this project completed by June 1<sup>st</sup>.

This year, because of the outrageous cost of building materials, especially steel prices, construction of a new wolf

enclosure has been temporarily put on hold. Our focus will instead be on improvements and upgrades to existing animal enclosures and people barriers.

As health concerns in the state have eased, we are now able to welcome school children for field trips once again! Within a three week period this May/June, we have over 500 children scheduled to learn about wolves, their habitats and challenges, traverse the forest learning about ecology and experience a pack howl! Along with this, we have a growing number of highly motivated, environmentally conscious, younger staff that contribute wonderful skills and work ethics with a deep passion for wildlife and the environment. All are future leaders of which we should be proud!

The grass is getting greener, tree buds are coming alive, and my favorite medicine bird, the hermit thrush, has arrived and announced the return of spring.

All is good!  
Aho,  
Will





# critter capers



It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of our beautiful wolf, Nipahwi. Born May 16, 2015, Nipahwi was not even seven years old when he died. Caretakers had noticed Nipahwi spending more time in his den area rather than atop his platform where he loved to keep an eye on his territory and greet visitors at the admissions building. During morning rounds by caretakers last week, Nipahwi was discovered deceased in his den as though he had simply fallen asleep. He was immediately transported to Cornell for a necropsy which indicated that Nipahwi passed away as a result of several aggressive cancers in his lungs, tonsils, and lymph nodes. We are so heartbroken and stunned, but so grateful we were able to allow him the space to be a wolf during his six years with us at Wolf Mountain. While he is sorely missed, his spirit lingers on in his habitat area...



## Director Dialog...Erin Lord-Astles



Wolves, coyote, and fox aren't the only species you might encounter at TWMNC! Recently volunteer staff shared camera trap images on our social media of the raptors (bald eagle, red tail hawk), corvids (crow, raven), and turkey vultures that frequently scavenge leftover deer on site. I loved this series of images not only because I am absolutely an avian enthusiast, but because they serve as a great example of how beneficial wolf and coyote habitat is for a great diversity of other wildlife.

TWMNC is incredibly rich habitat not only for the birds of prey previously mentioned, but for a wide array of passerines (aka song birds, perching birds) as well. In fact, during my most recent visit the first animals I encountered were not wolves! I was immediately greeted at the admissions entrance by many gliding and swooping tree swallows competing for nest box real estate.

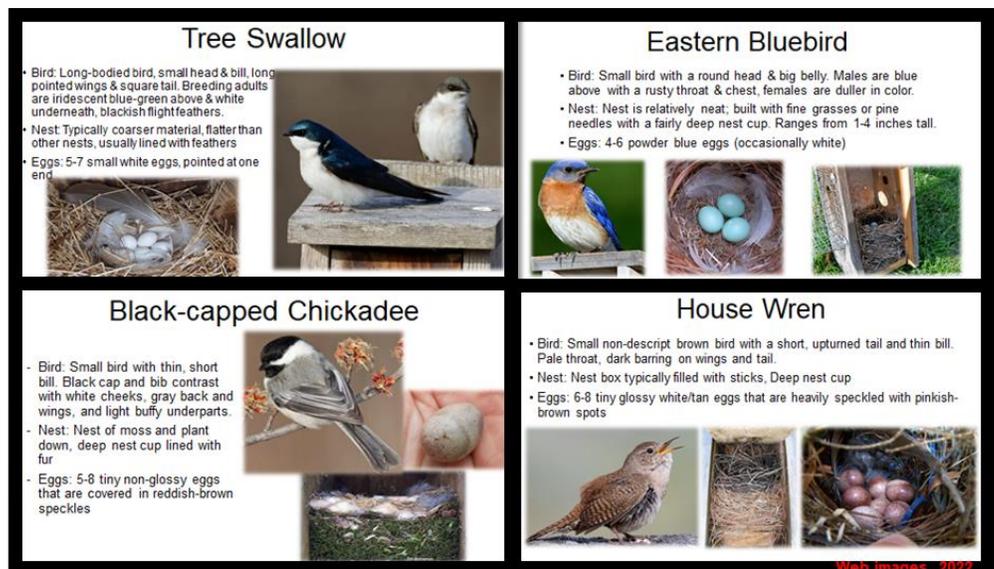
For decades habitat for cavity nesting birds has been in decline due to clearing of land for agriculture and development resulting in a loss of old trees, as well as competition from invasive house sparrows and European starlings. Our founder and curator Will has created 20-30 nest boxes you will notice hanging in the field along the perimeter fence. Nest boxes offer supplemental habitat to many native cavity nesters, particularly the tree swallows, eastern bluebird, house wrens, and black-capped chickadee.

Below I will offer some identification for each species, their nesting materials, and eggs. If you're interested in installing nest boxes on your own property, our recommendation is to build or purchase nest boxes that will open either from the front or side for ease of cleaning. We keep ours up high to deter predators such as raccoon, but for ease of access you can hang your nest boxes 5-6ft from the ground (using smooth metal poles rather than wood posts can also deter predators).

It's important to understand nest box regulations as well. Per federal law, citizens may not collect or possess any native bird nests, feathers, eggs, or carcasses without proper permits. Active nests are protected and should not be disturbed, but inactive nests are not, so to be on the safe side we recommend cleaning out your nest boxes prior to the start of breeding season in March.

Next time you visit

TWMNC, please take a moment to view and appreciate our nest box residents. You will have an excellent opportunity to observe breeding behavior in song birds. I'd like to recommend to staff and visitors alike; bring a pocket full of white chicken feathers (can collect from home or purchase at craft store). If you hold up white feathers so the tree swallows can see them, and then let the feathers go to drift on the wind, there's a good chance the swallows will grab up that feather and take it to their nest box. It's also common for the swallows to grab feathers directly from people's hands. ☺



## Arctic Foxes

**Peg Fuller, Head Fox Caretaker**

In the middle of April, Wolf Mountain received about a foot and half of snow. Several people were not impressed with the spring snow, but those little white fluff balls were very happy. The Arctic foxes are quite content in below-freezing temperatures and lots of snow. The transition from spring into summer will result in shedding the winter white and becoming sleek little brownish-tan foxes that resemble large domestic cats. One of the things that fascinates me about the arctic foxes is how different they look from summer to winter. Winter in the arctic is cold and very snowy. Having a nice big white coat really helps the animals stay warm and blend into the environment. Their beautiful coat not only helps them stay warm, but also protects them. As a small animal they cannot defend themselves as well as their larger cousins, like the red fox. Camouflage helps arctic foxes to hide. As the arctic changes to summer and the growing season is in full swing, the darker summer coat colors allow the arctic foxes to blend into the trees and brush not only to avoid predators, but also to allow them to sneak up on their prey!



Arctic foxes are naturally cautious of people. When Avalanche and Aurora were only a few weeks old, we began to socialize them to human caretakers. Earning their trust is a daily happening. As the Head Fox Caretaker, I spend time with them, so they are used to me being there. I also want them to have fun and try to base that fun around food or playing. We have several different toys for them, such as balls or tough dog chew type toys, even if I bring two toys into the enclosure, one toy becomes the focus and a game of chase and keep-away begins. They race around the enclosure squealing in delight. Many times, the chase game ends when one decides it is time to bury the prize. But this might just start round two of the chase when the other fox digs it up and races around with the toy again. Arctic foxes are very fast diggers and it is amusing to sit and watch the never-ending adventure.

## Coyotes

**Dave Conner, Head Coyote Caretaker**



Having worked with the Center's coyotes for over 10 years, I find it to be exciting and rewarding. I have socialized with our coyotes since they were only 10 days old! Socialization (working with a species to acclimate it to human presence) of coyotes is somewhat challenging since normally they are quite shy and not a pack animal. Wild coyotes tend to either be solitary or travel with their mate and any recent offspring. Once the young are about 9 months old, they disperse to find their own mate and territory. Coyotes are very intelligent animals and catch on

quickly when a caretaker is trying to do a physical exam or clean waste from a habitat area, thus, caretakers need to be more patient and creative when working near coyotes—hiding kibble or other snacks around the enclosure helps to divert the animal, but also to earn their trust as they begin to see the human as a deliverer of food!

The rewarding part of working with coyotes is when you finally do gain their trust and acceptance. Having them approach and hold somewhat still allows for quick health exams such as checking ears for mites, checking fur for potential parasites, looking at teeth, examining paws for injury, or administering medications/treatments. I am currently working with Sitka and Denahi to feel more comfortable when visitors are watching. By placing treats on their platforms and then rewarding them with the food and an ear scratch or belly rub (what canine doesn't love a good belly rub?!), I am reinforcing the "okayness" of a human in close proximity in controlled situations. This also reduces or even eliminates stress in the animal. Definitely NOT something to try with a wild coyote!

# Animal Birthday Parties



To recognize the spring birthdays of our animals, we hold mini celebrations periodically throughout the months of April & May. Being born in early spring is Mother Nature's way of ensuring that the wild offspring have plenty of warm months for the young to mature, adjust to life, and learn survival skills such as being able to find food before the cold, brutal winter rolls in.

Since, for the past many years, we have been offering our critters wrapped boxes filled with goodies and birthday cakes (which are promptly scent-rolled on and squashed to oblivion,) we thought it was time to change things up a bit. This year, our animals were provided with their very own frozen treats consisting of mashed peanut butter, banana, and yogurt all frozen into a waffle cone bowl. The treat was even topped off with whipped cream and blackberries! Caretakers were quite amused when the wolves, who are used to tearing apart flesh and chopping down hard on meat used the same bite force on whipped cream causing the white stuff to wildly sploosh all over those sweet wolfy faces!

Be sure to check out page 8 of this newsletter for additional upcoming birthday party dates!



**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 (minus the nozzles)
- 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)
- Gift Cards: Lowe's or Tractor Supply
- Exterior screws (2.5-3" size)
- Lag construction screws (3-4" size)
- Working push mower

## Office/Classroom

- Brown paper lunch bags
- 30 or 55-gallon garbage bags
- Toilet Paper
- Paper Towels
- Baby Wipes
- Non-latex gloves (large/XL)
- Heavy Duty Staple Gun

# Africa's Large Canids



by Alex Gross, Caretaker Assistant & Aspiring Conservation Biologist

Canidae, the taxonomic family including the “dog-like carnivorans,” is a truly diverse group, with different species located on every continent of the world except for Antarctica. Depending on the source, it is safe to say that around 34 species encompass the family Canidae. All of these have either independently arrived at the continents they currently range across or arrived accompanied by humans. As a result of the morphological diversity seen within the family, Canidae is adapted to survive in a variety of habitats, including various types of forests (i.e., tropical, and temperate), savannas, grasslands, tundra, deserts, and more. Furthermore, they occupy a variety of ecological niches. In this newsletter, I will touch upon the varying canids of Africa.

The African wild dog (*Lycaon pictus*) is a species of many names, commonly referred to as the African painted wolf, African painted dog, African hunting dog, Cape hunting dog, and more. I will refer to it as the African wild dog, as it is the most used name currently (this is subject to change, since all the names listed above are flawed in some way). To start, the African wild dog is not a wolf, despite “painted wolf” being a commonly used name. The wolves we see today belong to the genus, *Canis* (i.e., *Canis lupus* = gray wolf, *Canis rufus* = red wolf), whereas the African wild dog is the only living species of the genus *Lycaon*, which diversified from wolves



approximately six to four million years ago. The defining characteristic that separates African wild dogs from wolves is that African wild dogs only eat meat and cannot eat any other type of food. This is called hypercarnivory, a diet seen most in the large cat species. While the majority of the gray wolf diet is meat-based, they still can and will eat berries as well. This fits them in a class of carnivores that primarily eat meat, but can still consume other foods, called facultative carnivory. African wild dogs are social and live in a cooperatively breeding pack-system in which subordinate individuals help the alpha breeding pair raise their offspring. The primary route to reproductive success is leaving the pack you were born into and creating your own. They are currently endangered with around only 6,000 remaining, and only 1,400 of those being mature breeding individuals. Major players resulting in decreasing populations include habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, climate change, human-wildlife conflict, road accident, and disease.

Following this is the unique and mysterious Ethiopian wolf (*Canis simensis*), also called the Simien jackal and the Simien fox. This species is found only in Ethiopian highlands, and unlike the African wild dog, the Ethiopian wolf is a wolf, albeit very different from the gray wolves we see here at the Center. They are a solitary species and do not form cooperatively breeding packs like gray wolves and African wild dogs. Further, they are much smaller, and more coyote/jackal like in their size and build. Regarding diet, they are highly specialized in their feeding, with African alpine rodents such as the giant mole rat making up most of their diet. They are amongst one of the most endangered species in all of Africa, with less than 440 individuals remaining. The two big culprits to their current conservation status are agricultural development impeding on the Ethiopian highlands, and disease.



Next up is the black-backed jackal (*Canis mesomelas*). The best way to describe this species is as Africa’s coyote. They encompass much of the eastern and southern countries of Africa. Their diet is broad, ranging from rodents and snakes to ungulates and insects. Like coyotes, they also mate for life (monogamy) and live in family-based packs consisting of the breeding pair and their offspring. Once the breeding season approaches, the offspring will disperse to find their own mate, and the breeding pair will mate again.



Lastly is the African wolf (*Canis lupaster*), which has been under much taxonomic debate over the years. This species was once lumped in with the Eurasian golden jackal (*Canis aureus*), but research using DNA from scat samples determined that the African wolf was more like that of the Eurasian gray wolf (*Canis lupus lupus*), making it a close relative to the gray wolf. Like the black-backed jackal, they are monogamous, and have a diet ranging from hares, snakes, and ground squirrels to insects and small to medium sized ungulates. They persist exclusively in the

northern countries of African, and while they are of least concern regarding conservation, their populations are decreasing right now.

A common theme seen with all these canids regards their ears and legs. All these canids have noticeably large ears, especially when compared to gray wolves. Further, their legs are long and have a lankier build as opposed to stocky. This evolution is associated with the savanna habitat in which these species persist. Large ears are associated with being more advantageous in wooded habitat, the reason being that the species can hear better in a habitat where sound does not carry as far because of the presence of trees. However, in a wide-open habitat where sound travels far, having large ears means these canids can hear up to extremely long distances. All the canids mentioned above are small to medium in size and can easily have carcasses stolen by the social and significantly larger spotted hyenas and African lions. As such, the ability to hear over these large distances is highly beneficial to these species and makes them more vigilant. Regarding long legs, being lankier allows for these species to be more agile and travel longer distances when foraging for food, and more. African wild dogs are a textbook example of this. Their legs are exceptionally long, as they are predators that run long distances when hunting down their prey, called cursorial predators. They also face foraging-related pressures from lions and spotted hyenas which also causes their wide-ranging behavior. Having long legs and a lanky build allows them travel long distances with ease.

The similarities and adaptations of different species in the same biological families are evident when homing in on specific geographic areas. The comparing and contrasting of these differences and similarities is not only fascinating but reveal much to us about the evolutionary history of these species.



**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  
 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

## Upcoming 2022 Special Programs

### Wolf Communication Program (Howl Night)

Join us as we discuss 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!

May 14 6 pm - dark  
June 11 7 pm – dark  
July 9 7 pm – dark  
July 23 7 pm - dark

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)



### Camp with the Wolves! \$100 fee; pre-registration (ages 12 & up only)

Bring your own tent & camp under the stars with the howling wolves nearby. Price includes guided tour, dinner, campfire activity, breakfast, howl program, and opportunity to assist caretakers with animal feeding!

July 9 -10  
July 23 – 24  
August 6 - 7

#### 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.

### Animal Birthday Parties

Celebrate animal birthdays as we give them various special treats & gifts. Festivities begin at 2 pm.

May 1: Dyani, Kitan, Sequoyah, & Tehyah

May 15: Okwaho & Sakari, Dancing Turtle & Tashina

June 5: Arctic Foxes



### Wolf Photography

\$100 fee; pre-registration required; 10 am - 12 pm

Wednesday, July 27  
Saturday, July 30

Includes a short forest hike to our photography platforms for 'fence-free' photographs of the wolves