



Tauriel & Cypress

HOWL CHRONICLES

The Wolf Mountain Nature Center

November 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...

I definitely have become more reflective in my old age, so I will not write about autumn leaves or winter coming. Instead I have decided to ramble on about something different...so get ready.

In the beginning, as I have been told, wolves roamed earth long before us two-leggeds arrived on the landscape. Now these first roaming humans struggled to survive. Obtaining food was difficult, knowing what plants were safe, getting along with the neighbors & ourselves, raising children; no manual to follow...

One day the elders, perhaps a group of 25-year olds, decided something must be done or they as a people would not make it. One said, "have you watched the wolves hunt for their food?"

Indeed, perhaps if we watch for the vultures to come and then go take the wolves' food?" It worked! The people stole the wolves' food and ate deer meat that night.

In time there were too many mouths to feed and again the elders met—"What if we try some hunting techniques of the wolf?" So, they did and again were successful. They wondered what else can we learn from brother & sister wolf. And so, it has been told humans learned the importance of hierarchy and leadership, the village concept was implemented, people learned to work together and delegate tasks, protect the children and defend territories.

Wolf was revered, we painted their images on rocks and on our lodges. We added their fur to our

medicine bags, and warriors and hunters used "wolf medicine" in battle. We named our clans after wolf, sang songs and did dances of thanks to the wolf. When wolf sang its ancient song into the stillness of a cold winter night sky it took our prayers and thoughts to the creator of all things. So it was in the beginning...

to be continued in February's newsletter...

Aho! Walk in balance,
Will



Director Dialog...Erin Lord-Astles

Recently, I decided to re-read A Sand County Almanac (1949) by Aldo Leopold, which is pretty much required reading for any modern conservationist. The book consists of some beautifully written chapters on ecological observations and land ethic, but my favorite part is his essay titled "Thinking Like a Mountain", which I will share below.

This essay always makes me emotional; when I was in college it had a huge impact on my understanding of the ecological importance of protecting predators such as wolves. But it wasn't until I walked on Wolf Mountain and looked deep into the eyes of Dyani and Tamarack as young pups that I understood what Aldo meant about the "fierce green fire".



Aldo's words echo in my head as I read the recent articles regarding a dispersing wolf shot and killed during a coyote hunt in Otsego County in 2021. This animal was reported as the 3rd documented wolf in our state in the last 25 years. Not only does this suggest that wolves can and will reclaim previous territories given humans allow for that to happen, but it also highlights the importance of us refraining from indiscriminately killing other predators as each of these wolves were shot when mistaken for eastern coyotes.

And this is another reason why I feel The Wolf Mountain Nature Center has such an important mission, to educate our neighbors on how to coexist with wolves and coyotes. It is time for us all to start thinking more like a mountain.

Thinking Like a Mountain by Aldo Leopold

"A deep chesty bawl echoes from rimrock to rimrock, rolls down the mountain, and fades into the far blackness of the night. It is an outburst of wild defiant sorrow, and of contempt for all the adversities of the world.

Every living thing (and perhaps many a dead one as well) pays heed to that call. To the deer it is a reminder of the way of all flesh, to the pine a forecast of midnight scuffles and of blood upon the snow, to the coyote a promise of gleanings to come, to the cowman a threat of red ink at the bank, to the hunter a challenge of fang against bullet. Yet behind these obvious and immediate hopes and fears there lies a deeper meaning, known only to the mountain itself. Only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of a wolf.

Those unable to decipher the hidden meaning know nevertheless that it is there, for it is felt in all wolf country, and distinguishes that country from all other land. It tingles in the spine of all who hear wolves by night, or who scan their tracks by day. Even without sight or sound of wolf, it is implicit in a hundred small events: the midnight whinny of a pack horse, the rattle of rolling rocks, the bound of a fleeing deer, the way shadows lie under the spruces. Only the ineducable tyro can fail to sense the presence or absence of wolves, or the fact that mountains have a secret opinion about them.

My own conviction on this score dates from the day I saw a wolf die. We were eating lunch on a high rimrock, at the foot of which a turbulent river elbowed its way. We saw what we thought was a doe fording the torrent, her breast awash in white water. When she climbed the bank toward us and shook out her tail, we realized our error: it was a wolf. A half-dozen others, evidently grown pups, sprang from the willows and all joined in a welcoming melee of wagging tails and playful maulings. What was literally a pile of wolves writhed and tumbled in the center of an open flat at the foot of our rimrock.

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In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to kill a wolf. In a second we were pumping lead into the pack, but with more excitement than accuracy: how to aim a steep downhill shot is always confusing. When our rifles were empty, the old wolf was down, and a pup was dragging a leg into impassable slide-rocks.

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes - something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view.

Since then I have lived to see state after state extirpate its wolves. I have watched the face of many a newly wolfless mountain and seen the south-facing slopes wrinkle with a maze of new deer trails. I have seen every edible bush and seedling browsed, first to anaemic desuetude, and then to death. I have seen every edible tree defoliated to the height of a saddlehorn. Such a mountain looks as if someone had given God a new pruning shears and forbidden him all other exercise. In the end the starved bones of the hoped-for deer herd, dead of its own too-much, bleach with the bones of the dead sage, or molder under the high-lined junipers.



I now suspect that just as a deer herd lives in mortal fear of its wolves, so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer. And perhaps with better cause, for while a buck pulled down by wolves can be replaced in two or three years, a range pulled down by too many deer may fail of replacement in as many decades.

So also, with cows. The cowman who cleans his range of wolves does not realize that he is taking over the wolf's job of trimming the herd to fit the range. He has not learned to think like a mountain. Hence we have dustbowls, and rivers washing the future into the sea.



We all strive for safety, prosperity, comfort, long life, and dullness. The deer strives with his supple legs, the cowman with trap and poison, the statesman with pen, the most of us with machines, votes, and dollars, but it all comes to the same thing: peace in our time. A measure of success in this is all well enough, and perhaps is a requisite to objective thinking, but too much safety seems to yield only danger in the long run. Perhaps this is behind Thoreau's dictum: In wildness is the salvation of the world. Perhaps this is the hidden meaning in the howl of the wolf, long known among mountains, but seldom perceived among men."





critter capers



A brisk autumn morning opened our 16th annual Honoring the Spirit of the Wolf festival. Attendance was as strong as ever for this special day with many folks helping to stuff pumpkins for the animals before Caretakers delivered the treats. Some wolves dug right into their treats, some were a bit more cautious while others simply used their powerful jaws to grab the entire pumpkin, goodies and all, to enjoy the snack in a more secluded location. Besides the returning favorite presentations by the NYS DEC K9s and the Sled Dogs of Smokey Hill, new food vendors joined us this year and the Cornell Raptor Program was on site giving presentations on various birds of prey which was highlighted by a wild bald eagle soaring overhead! Perhaps he heard the calls of his kinfolk down below! Musician Matt Nakoa did a wonderful concert for us under the entertainment tent followed by magic shows for the kids led by magician Jim Okey. Truly a family fun day.





For our junior biologists...

Ever wonder how wolves stay warm in super cold climates such as the Arctic? When it's cold outside, humans put on coats, boots, and mittens. Wolves have natural adaptations (ways their bodies automatically adjust) in order to allow them to survive in temperatures as low as -40 degrees! That's cold!



Wolf fur is made up of two layers. The outer layer is called the **guard hairs** which are hairs that grow up to four inches long. These hairs protect from wind, rain, and snow. The second layer is called the **undercoat** and is a thick, soft layer that traps the warm air and insulates the wolf to keep it warm.

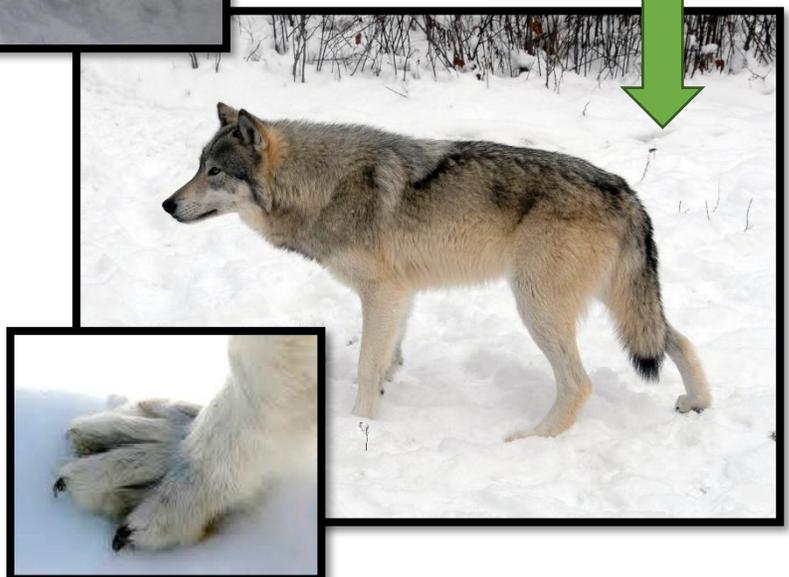


If winds and snows are really bad, wolves may dig out a den or find a cave to shelter in. Many pack members can fit into these spaces and their shared body heat keeps them warm.

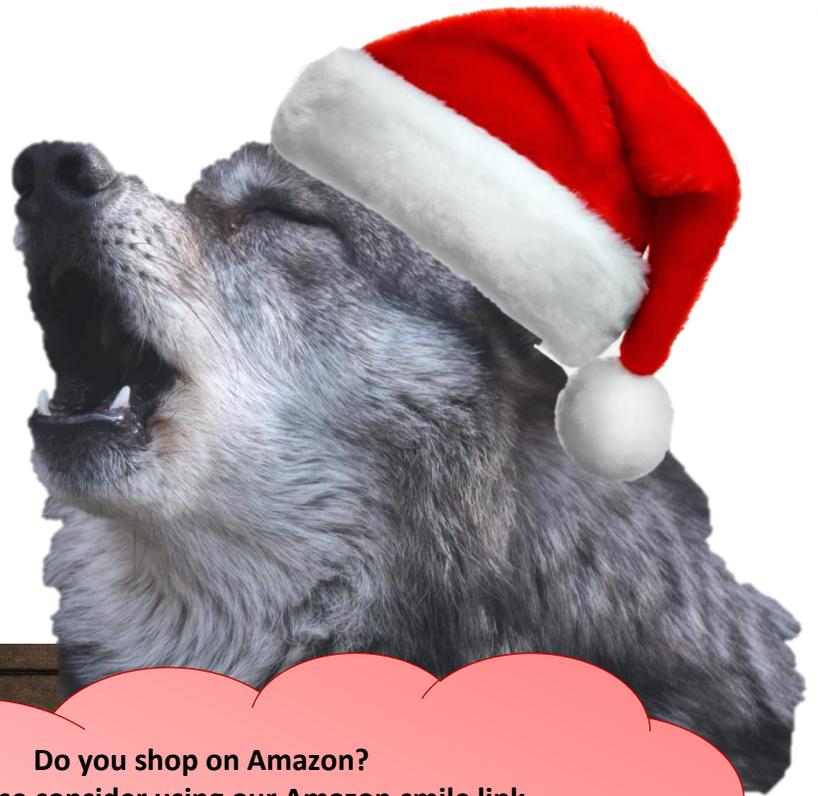


Wolves have big bushy tails that they use to wrap around themselves like a blanket when they curl up for a nap.

Sometimes when people want to walk better on snow they wear snowshoes or maybe they put crampons (spikes) on the bottom of their boots to help with ice. Wolves have large, webbed feet which not only help them to swim, but also provide more stability when walking on ice or snow. Fur on the bottom of paws and sharp claws help grip even more.



Easy way to support
me & my pack while
shopping for the
holidays!



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purchase costs at
no additional expense to you!



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 "pooper-scoopers"
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")
Gift Cards: Tractor Supply

Landscaping/Maintenance

Picnic tables & benches
Gift Cards: Lowe's
Exterior screws (2.5-3" size)
Lag construction screws (3-4" size)
Working push mower
Weed Whacker

Office/Classroom

Clorox/Lysol wipes
Toilet Paper
Paper Towels
Non-latex gloves (large/XL)
9x12" envelopes
Heavy Duty Staple Gun

The Importance of Wolf-Created Vigilance in Ungulate Herds

by Alex Gross, Caretaker Assistant & Aspiring Conservation Biologist

One of the reasons predators like wolves are so important to ecosystems is due to their status as a keystone species. The removal of species like these from ecosystems causes massive top-down impacts (or trophic cascades) which negatively affect the ecosystem these species range in. In other words, wolves hold entire ecosystems together, much like the keystone on a bridge holds an entire bridge together.



Before the wolf reintroduction to Yellowstone in 1995, the two species that could have any measurable impact on trophic processes were grizzly bears and cougars. Cougars are solitary compared to wolves, and thus do not impact herds to the same extent. A cougar will make a kill and eat what it can, but not the whole carcass, which is scavenged by other species like grizzly bears and coyotes. Now what about grizzly bears? Like cougars, they do not share the social characteristics that wolves do. Further, they are omnivores and not carnivores, and when they do kill ungulates for food (i.e., elk), they are more likely to kill the calves than healthy adults. As such, they also do not drive trophic cascades in an equivalent way to wolves. They do present an interesting area of research given their omnivorous diet, since they drive other processes like seed dispersal that have significant trophic implications.

In biology, there are ways in which biologists characterize the effect that a predator has on populations of prey. One of these is when a predator exerts a direct influence on how much prey is present in an ecosystem, called *density-mediated trophic effects*. For example, more wolves = less elk. This is usually how the return of wolves to Yellowstone and the impacts they had are chalked up. Before wolves returned, there was a surplus of herbivorous ungulates, causing widespread overgrazing which reduced the vegetation to almost nothing in the Yellowstone ecosystem. I will not go too deep into detail about all the negative effects this has because there are just so many. If you are curious, search a YouTube video called: *How Wolves Change Rivers*, and you will get the jist.

Anyways, the return of wolves and the impacts they have is not entirely because they hunt these herbivorous ungulates, reducing their numbers, and creating more balance within ecosystems. This is only part of the story. Another way in which biologists characterize how predators impact populations of prey deal with the impact predators have on prey behavior, called *behavior-mediated trophic effects*. This is where things get interesting. Before wolves were back in Yellowstone, herds of ungulates had extraordinarily little to be aware of. As I said above, cougars and grizzly bears do not exert the same controlling influence on prey populations that wolves do. As such, the herds in Yellowstone National Park lacked “fear” or “awareness” for predators, which is called *vigilance*. Less vigilance meant the herds could graze as much as they want. Think about any herbivore that eats grass. When they do so, their heads are down, and the awareness for what is going on around them is lowered. More time is spent grazing and less time is spent being vigilant. Now add wolves to an ecosystem that lacks a true keystone predator, and that all changes. Now the herds become vigilant, which means a multitude of things. Individuals in the herd spend more time with their heads looking up to watch for any signs of predators. They move far more as opposed to just staying and overgrazing one area. Even though the herds are still consuming vegetation, the rate at which they do so is far less just because of the threat that a predator poses in that ecosystem. This is just as important as wolves lowering the numbers of prey because they eat them. Wolves do not spend 24/7 eating prey, so there must be some controlling effect that is at play when wolves are not directly influencing the density of ungulates. That effect is behaviorally mediated, and the product of wolf created vigilance.



WHY DO WOLVES SCENT ROLL?

Scent rolling is the act of pressing the body against a strong-smelling object or scent. This behavior usually begins with the wolf pushing a cheek against the object, and then sliding on it until the side of the chest has cleared the object. The wolf will likely stand and repeat the process several times on each side of the body.

Wolves commonly perform this behavior with any strong or unique-smelling object within their territory, such as a smelly carcass (food), urine or feces from another animal outside the pack, or any other pungent odor encountered that is not a regular scent within their territory.

Many visitors ask why wolves, and subsequently their dogs, perform such a behavior. For wolves, the answer is simple: olfactory camouflage. We believe wolves are essentially transferring the scent of the different odor to their bodies so when hunting, their prey may not smell wolf, but rather the benign rolled-upon scent, when in close proximity of the hunting pack. This camouflage has obvious benefits for hunting wolves, as they may be able to gain closer access to their prey. Another theory for evolution of scent rolling is to transfer the scent of the rolling wolf onto the object chosen, thus "marking" it as an item within their territory. It also is a way for the wolf to "carry" the scent to the rest of the pack to share the information with them. Gray wolves likely utilize both of these advantages as a motivation to perform scent rolling.

So, why do dogs perform such a behavior? Some breeds may scent-roll for the same reasons wolves do, especially to mark their territory. A pertinent question to any interested dog owner is: "Does your dog typically scent-roll on your property more so than off your property?" If so, the motivation is likely a territorial marker. In some dog breeds, scent rolling is simply a rudimentary, or useless hereditary, tie-over from their ancestors, wolves. Regardless if domestic dogs perform scent rolling or not, the behavior is an important survival tool for gray wolves.



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

WE WILL BE CLOSED SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2022

Upcoming Special Programs

Winter with the Wolves

Celebrate the winter season & snow!

Dec. 11 11 am – 3 pm

A day of festivities including gifts for the animals, sled dogs, hot cocoa, & warm woodstoves!
Bring your snowshoes & hike our nature trails!



**We will be closed for the holiday season and staff vacations from
December 19, 2022 – February 4, 2023.**

We will reopen on Sundays beginning on Sunday, February 5, 2023