



Aurora & Avalanche

HOWL CHRONICLES

The Wolf Mountain Nature Center

February 2023

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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

Reflections from the Mountain...

Today, we have prestigious colleges and universities where people go indoors (for the most part) to learn about the outdoors: how to “manage” forests, rivers, wildlife, and resources. Mother Nature and animals are no longer the teachers. Many humans have lost their intimate understanding of the language of the trees, plants, animals, birds, and all that share the creation. Humankind is moving at a rabbit’s pace *away* from the natural world so much so that many do not have a clue how to act when they find themselves in a natural setting. A disproportionate number of people just don’t know anymore. More than ever, people need the educational experience of nature centers, quality wildlife parks, and zoos to foster an appreciation for trees, animals, plants, fish, birds, reptiles, insects, water, air...ALL

life is beyond measurement. What is going wrong in the “managed” wild places is nothing less than alarming.

So, on a positive note, in the spring we will be adding new life to the Center; wolf puppies, arctic fox kits and gray fox kits are all anticipated. Sadly, several of our long-time residents are approaching the end of their earth walk. This gift of young animals generates renewed hope and promise as do the first spring flowers after a long, cold, damp winter.

Recently on my rounds breaking ice out of water buckets and troughs, fighting with frozen locks, checking animal health and security, and picking up frozen scat, I thought about how wolves, being social animals, benefit from the company and interactions of others of their kind. Ample space

needs to be available with natural vegetation, trees for shade, and clean water. If a place is set up where they can climb up to a higher vantage point, they will spend significant time watching their surrounding from such a vista. Activities that allow wolves to use their olfactory (sense of smell) skills is essential. This can be achieved via enrichment activities that encourage exploration, discovery, and reward.

continued on page two.....



Head Animal Caretaker's Message...continued from page one



The best part of my enclosure visits is the socialization part. From the earliest days of the animals' lives and throughout their life cycle, spending time with these amazing animals lowers my blood pressure, creates a calming sense of peace, and connects me with such an incredible gift of sharing each other's presence.

Depending on which seasonal cycle they are in, the wolves are very different. The wolves I visit in May and June are not the same wolves I walk with in November. Certainly, in February and March (breeding season) I witness yet another side of the wolf. The way they look, hormone changes, diet changes, and weather temperatures all contribute to the amazing seasonal variances that affect the way the animals interact with their environment, each other, and their accepted human "pack mates." Gosh I love what I do!

A very wise elder once told me that he believed that the most vicious creature to ever walk the Earth is the human. I have to agree, however, will also add that we are also capable of great acts of compassion, generosity, humility, and positive creativity. It is time again, and long overdue, that we listen to the wind, talk to the trees, and welcome the spirit of the wolf back into this human dominated world.

Ah ho! Walk in balance,
Will



Do you have your 2023 Wolf Mountain calendar yet? As of print time for this newsletter, only 15 calendars remain! When they are gone—that is it for 2023. Calendars can be purchased for \$15 in our gift shop or via our website's gift shop link for \$20 (includes shipping costs.)

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/Country Max

- Landscaping/Maintenance**
- Picnic tables & benches
 - Gift Cards: Lowe's/Curtis Lumber
 - 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 Guns

Apply now for summer internships!

Karley Bush, Intern Coordinator

February is here and that means the opening of applications for our 2023 Summer Intern season! This is always an exciting time of year, as it marks the beginning of seeing our winter plans for the center really start to take shape and become a possibility with the upcoming changing of seasons and additional staff in the form of interns. We are especially excited that this year brings with it the expectation of new life and new opportunities for our center! With the anticipated arrival of wolf pups, grey fox kits, and potentially arctic fox kits, we anticipate a very busy season for our interns!



Newly created fox-centered internship opportunity for 2023!



Due to these exciting new additions, we need to create an entirely new habitat for our new species with their specific needs in mind. Hence, we are looking for the right person(s) to work as an **Assistant Fox Care Specialist**. This new position of Assistant Fox Care Specialist will be available as both a college internship opportunity and/or open to the consideration of non-college individuals who have a serious desire to work with and learn more about managing captive wildlife. A unique opportunity working alongside our Head Animal Caretaker and Head Fox Care Specialist, this position will include planning, constructing, and landscaping of the new gray fox enclosure as well as creating shelters and enrichment objects. In addition, it will also include hands-on care of the fox kits for a fully rounded experience with caring for captive grey foxes. Candidates will also be working with our current Arctic Foxes and any offspring they may have. The schedule for this position would start mid-April and be a consistent, minimum commitment of 20 hours a week for 3 months. Raising kits requires consistency!

Not really into just foxes? Apply for a more generalized program

For our typical Summer Intern positions, we offer a more 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, facility maintenance and landscaping, observation and documentation of animal behaviors, public relations, and basic non-profit office management. Candidates should be currently enrolled in a college program such as biology, pre-veterinarian, wildlife management, environmental conservation, or other related course of study. The schedule for general summer interns is Wednesday-Saturday from 10 am-3 pm, beginning the last week of May for 10 weeks. There will also be one mandatory 3 hour initial training on a Sunday in early May, one overnight campout (a Saturday into Sunday in July or August), and assisting with our Sunday, July 23 Wolves & Watermelons event that are required, however past interns have begun sooner or stayed later in the season based on their desires.

For both the position of Summer Intern and Assistant Fox Care Specialist, 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. More information and applications can be found on our website under the Volunteer/Intern tab.

(<https://www.thewolfmountainnaturecenter.org/volunteerintern.html>)

There is such a wealth of opportunity this upcoming season and we are excited to get started. I look forward to what new life and new interns will bring to our center this year!

Director Dialog...Erin Lord-Astles



During my most recent visit to Wolf Mountain, I had the privilege of walking the grounds up to the cabin with Karley Bush (Animal Caretaker and Intern Coordinator). I function more as a satellite staff person, so the wolves often regard me with “stranger danger” caution when I arrive alone. But they all know and love Karley, so I had more of an opportunity to watch them celebrate her return with wagging tails and happy howls. I am always struck by their magnificent coats during the winter when they are very much in their element and I am very much out of mine.

Winter is a time of reflection and planning for me. Next week I return to my job as an adjunct instructor at Finger Lakes Community College, where I teach several wildlife courses, as well as K-12 education at the Muller Field Station. Between classes I also start planning for my little community garden where I grow produce for my potbelly pigs and my friends. And I start planning for projects on my little farm, where I hope to one day build a small education center (Finger Lakes Wildlife Center, Inc.).

For me, first-time homeownership has been an incredibly humbling and character-building journey. We purchased our home on short sale about 6 years ago. I was immediately drawn to the property; nice house, 20 acres, huge pole barn, fishing pond, looked like paradise! People use the phrase “can’t see the forest for the trees” but I had the opposite problem. I was so fixated on the big picture I couldn’t see the smaller details that would have alerted me to some obvious red flags.

I truly love my home and feel grateful to have it. But over the last few years as I have worked to rehab this property and install a trail system, I have discovered that it really is a prime example of the landscape-level exploitation that people have inflicted over the last couple of centuries. Historically a maple-ash swamp then converted to farmland, my current home once served as a quarry and then an asphalt company between the 1960s-1990s before it was converted into horse ranch and residence in the early 2000s. After looking over decades of aerial photography, I can see that nearly every usable resource had been extracted from this plot. Since then, the forest has somehow managed to regenerate, but then the previous landowners selectively cut down the largest parent trees, changing the hydrology of all the surrounding properties, killing several acres of trees, and opening the canopy to allow non-native invasive plants to invade the herbaceous layer of the forest floor.



1973: Quarry years



2022 at FLWC

My ash trees are rapidly being felled by the emerald ash borer beetle (EAB). Most of our topsoil had been removed so invasive plant species became the first colonizers following such disturbance. Our forests and fields are dominated by multiflora rose, European buckthorn, knotweed, mugwort, garlic mustard, swallowwort and other plants with low ecological value. This was also yet another property where people would use the back acreage as a dump; we've found an old trailer sunken in mud, 1960s dodge trapped under a fallen tree, we have removed tires, rusted metal, glass, a cache of needles - the most creepy and exciting find being a porcelain doll head and some bottles from the early 20th century.



Since I have started the cleanup and completed the first set of trails, I have noticed native plants like jack in the pulpit, red trillium, and ostrich fern returning. I gleefully discovered a fairy-ring of morel mushrooms ready for a partial-harvest every May. I am witnessing the return of herons, geese, mergansers, wood ducks, king fisher, owls, hawks and have found evidence they are using our home for breeding grounds. We have massive frog choruses all throughout the spring and summer. We have witnessed mink and muskrat now using the previously overgrown pond. We have seen fox produce many kits, had a visit from a fisher, and were elated to have

coyote move in to take advantage of our new trails and the healthy community of deer, cottontails, raccoon, opossum, and vole. I feel like our land has been ill for decades and I am pleased to see even the small amount of progress made has healed it enough to become usable habitat for my wild neighbors.



I will happily spend the rest of my life trying to correct the mistakes of the past and return these 20 acres to ecologically rich habitat. The goal is to become a better steward for future generations. And to always love the land better than my more recent ancestors have.

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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 here:  
<https://www.thewolfmountainnaturecenter.org/donatesponsor.html>



**United States  
Department of  
Agriculture**





# critter capers



December 11<sup>th</sup> brought the promise of snowfall to an otherwise dry winter day! As we opened the gates to visitors for our 16<sup>th</sup> annual Winter with the Wolves celebration, the snow began falling (and falling and falling!) By closing, we had over six inches of new snow! Perfect for a winter event with wolves, sled dogs, presents, and Santa! Well, perfect except for the icy conditions created on our steep driveway. Cautious folks walked up and down the hill where as the more adventurous threw it into 4-wheel drive and low gear and slid down. Everyone was safe and enjoyed the activities. Per usual, each animal had its own technique for opening the special holiday gifts: some approached tentatively, some swung right into it, some used the stomp and pounce method, and Kitan employed the "grab-and-go" path. Absolutely no problem for him to simply use his jaw strength to pick up his present and head for seclusion.



## Arctic Foxes

**Peg Fuller, Head Fox Care Specialist**

I think it is understood by everyone at the Wolf Mountain Nature Center that the Arctic Foxes are obviously very comfortable in winter more than any other animal here and especially more so than any of the humans. Mother Nature had a wonderful Christmas gift for the foxes. We had almost a foot of snow, that should have been enough to satisfy these little furry creatures, but no, more snow was coming. The minus zero temperatures with windchills that reached at least negative 30--what an extra special present for them.

They really enjoy the cold, wind, and snow. Caretakers provide fresh hay for all the animals. Everyone enjoys lying in a nice warm, dry bed.... well, except the foxes.

Snowflake doesn't even touch the hay. Aurora and Avalanche use it as an opportunity to play chase. They roll in it, chase each other and just think it is a fun thing. When they are done playing, they go back to finding a spot where the wind or snow blows directly in their faces and the temperatures are at their lowest.

Arctic foxes normally live in the arctic region of the world, let's just say the top of the world (Alaska, Siberia, Scandinavia, etc.). Temperatures can easily be -50°F. In the winter the fox's undercoat adds about two inches of dense fur that helps them stay warm. The fur is white, so they look amazing in the winter and blend in with the snow and ice in the arctic (camouflage.) Their body fat also changes from about 6 % in summer to 30% body fat in winter. This gives them extra insulation in the cold. They also use their bushy tails for extra warmth while they sleep; they might lay on it or cover their faces with it. The fur on the bottom of feet helps them conserve heat and provides traction on ice. They also possess a Counter Current Heat Exchange system. As a simple explanation, it means their veins and arteries are very close to each other, so as blood flows from the extremities it is self-warming. The difference is in humans, our hands and feet get cold and the blood has to come back to the heart to warm. On those really cold windchill days of -30°F I wish I had this system. Another way foxes stay warm is a result of their compact bodies, short legs, short noses, and short ears that help conserve energy. They are definitely built for the cold. Basically, arctic foxes are animals that are capable of living in harsh winter conditions and can go a long time without food in the winter.

Avalanche, Aurora, and Snowflake have a recommendation. They think everyone should come visit them in February or early March. They enjoy seeing the people all bundled up and trying to stay warm. Shedding season will quickly follow, so don't miss out on seeing the beautiful white fluffy coats.



## Coyotes

**Dave Conner, Head Coyote Care Specialist**

Coyotes are typically shy yet curious creatures who naturally avoid humans. Contradictorily though, coyotes still tend to live in or near our backyards. As opportunistic feeders, they find easy meals in our gardens, brush and compost piles where mice, moles, rabbits, snakes and other small critters are readily available for a meal. To provide our coyotes a sense of security we have created larger buffer zones between people and animal with trees and shrubs. While this helps the coyote to feel safer, it does make it a bit more challenging for the public to see these canids. Being able to visibly watch coyotes has a greater impact and provides a greater educational opportunity for our visitors.

One of my responsibilities as Head Coyote Care Specialist is to ensure our coyotes are comfortably acclimated to living in their enclosures while still being somewhat visible to the public. I began a lengthy process to reassure and "desensitize" the coyotes to the public by rewarding the coyotes with food whenever they would come to the front viewing area of their habitat when there were no visitors. Once the animals were comfortable with this step, I would then repeat the same process while open to the public as visitors watched. After several weeks of feeding/rewarding the coyotes in this manner, it became possible for me to talk with the public as the coyotes moved comfortably about in the front viewing area of their habitats. Come visit Wolf Mountain and talk to me about coyotes!

# For our junior biologists...

## My...what big teeth you have! And it's a good thing!

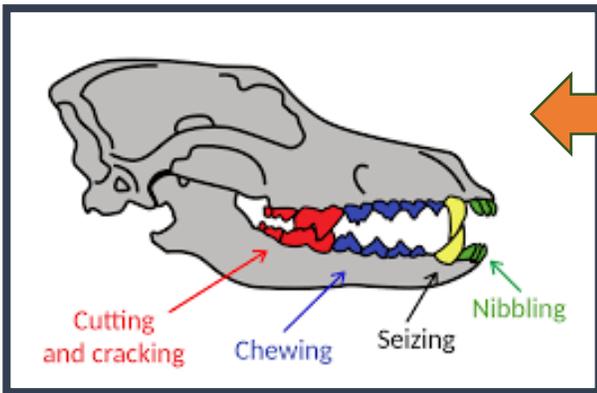


Tamarack giving a big yawn

As primarily meat-eaters, wolves need lots of strong teeth to help capture, tear, and chew their prey. Adult gray wolves have 42 teeth compared to humans only having 32.



Tauriel's perfect chompers



Wolves have four types of teeth—each with its own specific purpose. **Incisors** are the smaller front teeth used for biting small bits of meat. **Canines** are the four long, sharp teeth necessary for grabbing and gripping their prey. The super sharp carnassial teeth work sort of like a saw to rip meat away from the bones. **To crush and grind the meat into small pieces for swallowing, wolves use their back molars.**

Even though they do not use a toothbrush or go to the dentist, wolves usually have fairly clean teeth. Did you ever wonder how they keep them so clean? Wolves chew on the bones and fur of dead animals. Gnawing on bones helps rub food particles off the wolves' teeth while the typically bristly fur of their meal acts like dental floss to clean between the teeth. Sometimes wolves help groom each other by licking food off of each other's teeth.



Cypress getting teeth groomed from his sister Tauriel



Did someone say "cheese?"

Sometimes wolves show their teeth as a warning to others to back off from their meal as Teyyah is doing here.



To learn more about a wolf's jaw strength, check out this video on YouTube: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9u-uhmXisQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9u-uhmXisQ)

# The Yellowstone Wolf Project and Legacy of Doug Smith

by Alex Gross, Caretaker Assistant & Aspiring Conservation Biologist

Many people who are familiar with wolves know of their historic reintroduction to Yellowstone National Park in January 1995. As I often put it to visitors, it is a poster child example for wildlife reintroductions. Future reintroductions, especially those involving carnivores that often receive mixed attitudes from the people that must live around them, should follow, adapt, and even build upon the success of Yellowstone and its wolves.

The success of the reintroduction lives on today under the ongoing Yellowstone Wolf Project, which was established in the time leading up to the wolves' return. A plethora of research has been conducted and continues today, focusing on topics relating to wolf population genetics, behavior, pack dynamics, disease ecology, trophic studies, and much more. How were these data compiled? Since the inception of the Project, around 600 wolves have been collared and more than 35,000 hours of wolf behaviors have been observed (Wilson, 2022). This involved over 1,500 aerial flights, and over 20,000 miles of hiking and skiing (Wilson, 2022). This wealth of information has made the wolves of Yellowstone one of, if not the most, well studied population of wolves in the world. An incredible feat considering that only 28 years ago, there were no wolves in Yellowstone. This already large body of information and research continues to grow today and will continue to grow decades into the future. The development of the Yellowstone Wolf Project took the passion and dedication of many diligent people, but one name sticks out.

Dr. Doug Smith was hired by Yellowstone National Park as the Lead Biologist of the Wolf Project in the early 1990s to reintroduce the wolves. In 1997, after the wolves were successfully reintroduced, Doug assumed the role as Head of the Project, and served that role all the way up until late 2021. Doug recently retired after being with Yellowstone Wolf Project since the very beginning. He also oversaw the Yellowstone Elk Project and grew the bird program in his time there. In short, Doug Smith is a wolf hero, and his impact for not only Yellowstone's wolves, but for wolves altogether, is unquantifiable. When talking about the Yellowstone wolf reintroduction, I often joke and say that physically acquiring the wolves to reintroduce was the easy part of the whole thing. I cannot even begin to explain the level of passion, diligence, patience, and resilience needed to collaborate with the local ranchers (who historically have never liked wolves) in not only establishing a relationship but maintaining that relationship over the decades to follow. As someone who wants to work in the field and has been encapsulated by large social carnivores, Dr. Smith has been an inspiration to me; a person I aspire to be like, and someone I look up to as I carve out my career. From the whole staff here at the Center, we thank Doug for his outstanding career in Public Service and wish him the absolute best in his retirement. If you are interested in some of Doug's work, I recommend the three books below:

- 1) Decade of the Wolf: Returning the Wild to Yellowstone
- 2) Wolves on the Hunt: The Behavior of Wolves Hunting Wild Prey
- 3) Yellowstone Wolves: Science and Discovery in the World's First National Park

## References:

Wilson, S. (2022, Jan 8). 'Honest, hardworking, humble': Yellowstone National Park's lead wolf biologist retires after 28 years. *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*.  
<https://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/>

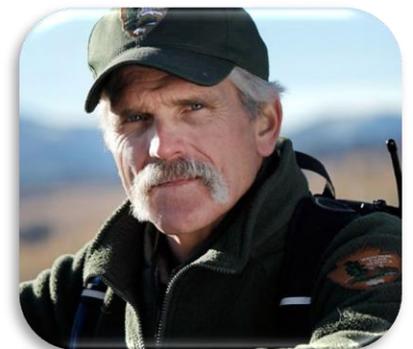


Photo of Doug Smith: National Park Service

## Open Hours and Admission Rates

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

|                                                                | Sundays                                                                                            | Mon.   | Tues.  | Wed.   | Thurs. | Fridays                                                                    | Saturdays                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Regular Season<br>September 1 – June 30<br>(closed in January) | Open 12 – 4 pm<br>Various animal enrichment programs;<br>Self or Guided Tours at 12:30 and 2:00 pm | Closed | Closed | Closed | Closed | Closed                                                                     | Closed                                                                     |
| Summer Season<br>July 1 – August 31                            | Open 12 – 4 pm<br>Various animal enrichment programs;<br>Self or Guided Tours at 12:30 and 2:00 pm | Closed | Closed | Closed | Closed | Open 12 – 3 pm<br>Various animal enrichment programs;<br>Self-Guided Tours | Open 12 – 3 pm<br>Various animal enrichment programs;<br>Self-Guided Tours |
| Admission                                                      | Children 5 & under Free<br>Folks 6 & up \$8.00                                                     | Closed | Closed | Closed | Closed | Children 5 & under Free<br>Folks 6 & up \$8.00                             | Children 5 & under Free<br>Folks 6 & up \$8.00                             |

## Upcoming Special Programs

### Wolf Communication Program (Howl Night)

**Our monthly howl nights return in April!**

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!

**April 1 6 pm – dark**

**May 6 6 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)

### Animal Birthday Parties

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

April 16: Cayuga & Seneca,  
Cypress & Tauriel

April 23: Tamarack & Tehyah,  
& Coyotes

April 30: Dyani, Kitan, &  
Sequoyah

May 7: Dancing Turtle & Tashina,  
Okwaho & Sakari

June 4: Arctic Foxes

Please visit our website's "events" tab for more upcoming programs & special events including camping, enrichment programs, photography opportunities and more! Activities are updated often throughout the year!

[www.TheWolfMountainNatureCenter.org](http://www.TheWolfMountainNatureCenter.org)

### Photography Sessions of Wolves

**Saturday, Feb. 18**

**Saturday, Mar. 25**

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.

