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HOWL CHRONICLES

The Wolf Mountain Nature Center

November 2023

562 Hopkins Crandall Rd., Smyrna,
NY 13464

(607) 627-6784

twmncwolves@yahoo.com

TheWolfMountainNatureCenter.org

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

Head Animal Caretaker's Message...Will Pryor

People often ask me, "How are the wolves doing?" They are doing very well indeed and have been very vocal lately, in part because the leaves are now gone from the trees and bushes, thus allowing the wolves to see beyond the summer foliage boundaries and to hear and smell more as the winds carry more easily. This also results in more howling!

Now that temperatures have dropped below freezing, deer are on the move more, resulting in increased road killed deer being delivered for the wolf buffet. While it's back to dealing with ice in water troughs, there is an element of enchantment for the wolf pups as they enjoy their own version of ice hockey with the ice chunks. Given large organic enclosures, the animals will find their own enrichment toys. Speaking of the pups, all are growing nicely (65-75# each at just 7 months old.) They have been such a welcome ray of sunshine to help ease the sadness of losing old

animals. Tashina, almost 16, is still getting around as if she was an Olympic Senior Citizen. Our North Pack roams their 9-acre woods and howls to the four directions. Tehyah & Tamarack continue to confuse visitors as to who is who as they look so similar. Sakari & Okwaho "talk trash" to their neighbors Cypress & Tauriel who have dragged and dispersed their deer meals all over their habitat. The two spend hours chasing and interacting with the meal-stealing ravens. Cypress has earned the duty of sentinel and sends his alarm barks throughout the Center if he even thinks he suspects intruders. Cayuga, going on 13 years old, continues to have a strong spirit and patiently waits for his special Atlantic Salmon dinners and has been quite social lately with visitors at the fence.

Our gray tree foxes Fern & Trillium have grown and are very comfortable in their spacious habitat and absolutely love visits

from Caretakers. Aurora & Avalanche (Arctic foxes) have transitioned into their winter coats which astonishes visitors thus opening up an educational moment which is a huge component of our mission: giving folks a chance to see & learn about animals they may never see in the wild.

As I do my Center walk-about I always think and wonder how I can make life better for these kindred spirits. Just to walk amongst them and be greeted as an equal is such a humbling experience. So as the snow begins to fall and the days are short and dark, it is time to slow everything down just enough to not miss a single minute of this.

Aho!
Walk in balance.
Will



Director Dialog...Erin Lord-Astles

The Biophilia Hypothesis

Recently, I brought my Finger Lakes Community College (FLCC) animal care interns up to Wolf Mountain to tour, learn about the animals, help out on a project, and to explore the possibility of an internship at Wolf Mountain. Before we left, I pulled out my wood flute and played for the animals. The



wolves (and Kenai Coyote) responded to my clumsy flute work with a chorus of low, gentle howls. It felt like a very special moment and was as enriching for us humans as it was for the animals.

A moment like this just reinforces our **biophilia**, which is the human tendency to try to emotionally connect and interact with nature and other living things. Some people hypothesize that biophilia is genetically predisposed in humans, that it is written in our DNA to be attracted to nature, and yet so many people today have lost that connection entirely. Conservation education may be the key to rekindling that relationship.

My path to conservation education was a long one. I started my internship at Wolf Mountain 10 years ago. From there I was a field research assistant, a zookeeper, a sea lion trainer, a travelling exotic animal handler, a K-12 conservation educator, and college instructor. I have had the opportunity to work with wildlife both in captive settings and in the wild. I love both scenarios equally as forming a close relationship to my zoo animals gave me the chance to learn and connect with a species; my wildlife field work gave me insight into their place in the world and ecological importance. My dual education has been complimentary to each other and I am continuously learning new and interesting things.

Now, as adjunct faculty at FLCC, I have the opportunity to share my passion for nature with others. It is so rewarding to see people of all ages become excited by the outdoors, when you see that “lightbulb moment” when a kid makes a connection with an ecological concept, and ultimately when I see my former interns and students now working as zookeepers, DEC technicians, and the next generation of environmental stewards and conservationists. I love what I do!

It wasn’t all sunshine and rainbows however, many times when I took younger students out into the field, I heard some alarming phrases: Often when I took high school students out on the canoes to teach them about beavers as ecosystem engineers, trying to get them to enjoy a beautiful view of hills and lakes carved by glaciers and appreciate the rich tapestry of wetland life, I would hear several teenagers ask repeatedly “when will we be back to WIFI?”. I once had a 16-year-old say to me on a 3-hour hike “This is the longest I have ever been outside”. That is shocking, and in my opinion, completely an unacceptable disservice to our youth. After all, these kids should grow up to be informed stakeholders in their most important resource, our planet!





I once heard someone say that conservation education is a “reintroduction to reality” and I could not agree more. In my cohort of millennials, I have seen a massive shift away from the need to zombie-scroll on social media and acquire the next hot product towards more people opting for a homesteader lifestyle, more people interested in agriculture, wine making, hunting, fishing, crafting, and animal husbandry. In many fine dining restaurants, farm to table meals offer city folks the opportunity to taste real authentic food instead of the usual over processed, factory products. Organic products and new age wellness programs grounded in nature are multibillion dollar industries. In my humble

opinion, it’s the biophilia hypothesis in effect; human society can not only be chaotic, but is highly artificial in its content - our genes are screaming for a connection to nature. Like Henry David Thoreau suggested, more people seem to be yearning to metaphorically go out to the woods to “live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see what it had to teach”.

There’s mounting research that suggests that spending time in nature has many benefits to improving our emotional health and that green spaces even in urban areas provide many cognitive benefits to attention control and working memory. But there are of course more practical benefits to a conservation education such as promoting land stewardship, proper management of wild resources, dispelling public misconceptions about the natural world, being an informed voter in environmental policy matters, and most importantly - increasing **cultural carrying capacity** (how many animals humans are comfortable sharing habitat with) for all living things including predators like wolves and coyote. That is, I think, one of the most important missions of The Wolf Mountain Nature Center.

Wolf Mountain provides a place where a diverse audience can observe gray wolves, eastern coyote, arctic fox, and gray fox and foster an appreciation for these animals and their ecological importance through unique and interesting conservation education programs. These animals have been historically vilified or underappreciated in American culture, but when people have access to learning about them, when they can see them in a naturalistic environment, smell them, hear them, when they can look deep into their eyes – then people will connect with these animals. And when people form connections, they care about what happens, they care about protecting their future and our own.

(note: all people shown in photos are licensed animal caretakers;
the public cannot have physical contact with the animals at the center)



United States
Department of
Agriculture



Spirit of the Wolf



The 17th annual honoring the Spirit of the Wolf celebration occurred on October 8, 2023! A cooler, somewhat rainy-day enveloped visitors but certainly did not dampen the spirits of anyone! Folksy bluegrass music greeted festival goers, many of whom also saw the wolf pups near the main entrance. The yummy smells of various food trucks wafted through nostrils of wolves and humans as demonstrations and programs were put on by The Sled Dogs of Smokey Hill, NYS DEC K'9s, and Cornell Raptors. Per usual, the wolves, coyotes, and foxes all enjoyed their special enrichment items of pumpkins filled with tasty treats.



What kind of fox is that?

Often visitors enter the fox area and ask what kind of animals they are and if they are all the same kind. Currently we have two different species of fox: arctic and gray. The two share similarities and differences.

Now that winter is approaching, visitors can clearly see that the two fox enclosures have very different animals. The Arctic foxes, Aurora and Avalanche, are proudly displaying their white super fluffy coats. The gray foxes, Fern and Trillium, look like they did all summer (gray body, red on the neck area, white throat area, and black tip on the tail). They look a little bigger because they are still growing and getting a winter coat. Arctic foxes will shed the white fur in the spring and will be brown and black in the summer and will look much smaller than they do in the winter. While both are part of the canid family, they have many differences. As you approach the fox area you may hear screeching. The Arctic foxes do a very good impression of wild monkeys screaming. The gray foxes have a different sounding scream.



The gray foxes have semi-retractable claws. This is similar to a domestic cat. Gray foxes can twist their wrists 180 degrees to accommodate their tree climbing. They have a sleek body with long legs. Gray foxes can be found from Canada down to South America and generally live in a small area of approximately one mile. Gray foxes prefer rocky canyons and ridges, but can also be found in



wooded areas, open desert and grasslands. They will make their dens in old hollow logs or in trees, in boulder piles, in caves, or they may take over an abandoned burrow and enlarge it for their own use. Their young will stay with their parents for approximately nine months. It is believed they mate for life.

The Arctic foxes have claws that are like a dog or wolves, they do not retract. Their eyes are like cat's eyes and narrow to a slit to protect them from the sun and reflection on the snow. Their body is compact with short legs, short ears, and short nose which helps them conserve energy. They are found in the Arctic and Subarctic regions of Russia, Europe, and North America. They live on the Arctic tundra and pack ice. Arctic foxes can travel hundreds of miles in a year. They return to their permanent dens for birthing and raising their young but spend much of the year traveling. Once the young are approximately 90 days old, they all disperse and travel alone. The mated pair may stay together or travel alone until mating season.



Both animals are very agile and fast. Visitors will notice the gray foxes climb to the top of their enclosure while the arctic foxes will walk up the ramps to small walkways but do not climb trees or venture too high. Frequently Trillium and Fern will jump right onto the shoulders or backs of the caretakers or onto their laps looking for snuggles and scratches. Avalanche and Aurora will approach caretakers looking for food but will retreat if there is no food offered. The gray foxes want attention, petting, even belly rubs. The Arctic foxes prefer not to be touched. While you are visiting our foxes, you will see we just started construction on a new fox habitat area. Hopefully it will be completed in the Spring of 2024. What kind of foxes will the enclosure have in it? You will have to wait and see.

Coyotes

Dave Conner, Head Coyote Care Specialist

As hunting season approaches, I wanted to address a common myth that people believe in regards to coyote populations being controlled by hunting. Many folks think that hunting and indiscriminately killing coyotes will reduce the number of coyotes in a given area; in fact, the exact opposite is true! "The hunting and killing of coyotes stimulate increases in their populations by disrupting their normal self-regulating social structures, thus encouraging breeding and migration." Think of it this way: killing coyotes in a given area essentially signals to other coyotes that there is now an uninhabited territory available. Being opportunists, another family of coyotes will move into the area.



"Undisturbed coyote populations are self-regulated as a result of food and habitat availability and territorial defense of family packs." Normal coyote family units consist of a pair of reproducing adults who discourage reproduction by subordinate members. If one or both of the breeding pair is killed, the subordinate members will disperse to find mates and reproduce. This results in greater numbers of coyotes breeding at younger ages and producing larger numbers of pups who will often survive due to a temporary increase of available prey; thus, leading to increases in coyote populations.

Not only do coyote killing contests **not** reduce populations long-term, they also do **not** reduce conflicts with humans, pets, or livestock, but will probably increase them. Exploited coyote populations result in younger, less experienced coyotes which have not learned appropriate hunting behaviors. As a result, these coyotes will tend to prey on easier targets such as livestock and pets within fenced areas who cannot escape as would a normal meal such as a rabbit or mouse. Additionally, most coyote killing contests occur in woodlands and grasslands where conflicts with humans, livestock, and humans is minimal and does not target "problem causing coyotes" that have become acclimated to living near humans and become used to feeding on garbage, pet food in garages, and unsecured livestock carcasses.

In summary, it is best to learn to coexist with the coyotes and allow their natural self-regulation to control their population. Besides, they eat mice, snakes, rats, rabbits, and squirrels to eliminate them from your garden and home!

(Information obtained from: Project Coyote's Fostering Co-existence and articles on "Why Killing Coyotes doesn't Work")

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>

We are registered with NYS Charities (reg # 49-06-68). EIN #20-5274163

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
Commercial grade garden hose (3/4")
Gift Cards: Tractor Supply/Country Max
Gift Cards: Chewy.com

Office/Classroom

Clorox/Lysol wipes
Toilet Paper
Paper Towels
Hand Sanitizer
Non-latex gloves (large/XL)
Heavy Duty Staple Guns

Landscaping/Maintenance

Picnic tables &/or benches
Gift Cards: Lowe's/Curtis Lumber
Working push mower
Various power drill bits
Contractor size trash bags

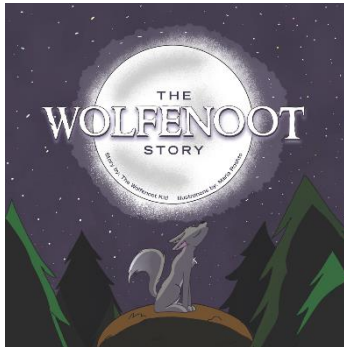
For our junior biologists...

7

Have you ever heard of a “holiday” called WOLFENOOT?



Wolfenoot is about celebrating our pack - human and animal - helping where we can, and making the world a better, kinder place. It is a special day thought up by a seven-year-old boy from New Zealand! According to the inventor of this holiday, this is the day “when the Spirit of the Wolf brings and hides small gifts around the house for everyone. Those who have been or are kind to dogs receive better gifts than anyone else. To mark this holiday, you should eat roast meat (because wolves eat meat) and cake decorated to resemble a full moon.”



Wolfenoot happens every year on November 23. According to their website: “Wolfenoot is about celebrating our pack - human and animal - helping where we can, and making the world a better, kinder place.” This day celebrates both the Spirit of the Wolf and kindness towards animals, especially dogs since they are descendants of the wolf. Since this young boy’s idea grew so much, his mom helped form a small non-profit where they sell things like books and shirts to spread awareness around the world about the importance of taking care of animals and conservation (his mom works at a zoo in New Zealand.) The money made from the sales is then donated to places that care for animals like wolves and foxes.

Cool idea, right?! **Kids can do so much to help animals and spread kindness.** Many years ago, a class of students from one of our local schools made tote bags with colored handprints and gave them to us to sell in our gift shop to help raise money for the animals. Another boy had a huge birthday party and asked everyone to skip bringing him gifts and instead bring money to donate to the wolves. Other kids have held can/bottle drives and brought the money to animal shelters. Recently, two young girl scouts did some research and created a beautiful information board about wolves and set it up near our admissions building for all visitors to read. Many years ago, my 12-year son who volunteered at our SPCA felt horrible that there were so many dogs and cats still left at the shelter and alone on Christmas, so he made dozens of felt stockings (fish shape for the cats and bone shaped for the dogs), filled them with goodies like catnip, toys, and biscuits and delivered them on Christmas eve. We still are not sure who appreciated it more, the staff or the animals.



How can **you** show kindness to animals? It’s okay to be creative!

- Be respectful to living things. That may mean leaving a bird nest alone, not squashing a bug, or not pulling your cat’s or dog’s tail
- Volunteer at an animal shelter
- Plant flower gardens for bees, butterflies, and birds
- Walk your neighbor’s dog (with permission of course!)
- Organize a fundraiser (see some ideas above) and donate the money to a shelter or other animal care facility
- Be responsible for your own pets and feed them on time, exercise or play with them, let an adult know if they seem hurt, sick, or scared

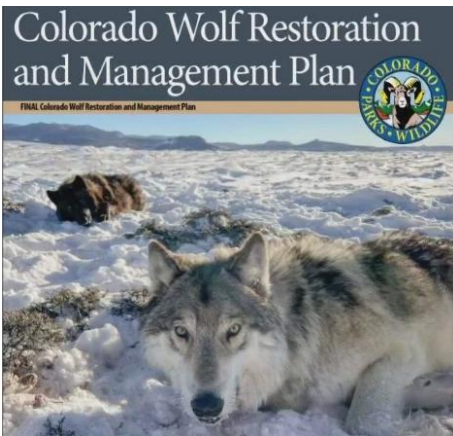
Remember—it is all about kindness and helping to protect animals, so get out there and celebrate Wolfenoot!

Wolves in the Adirondacks: Feasible or Fallacy?

by Alex Gross, Caretaker Assistant & Aspiring Conservation Biologist

News of wolf reintroduction has been hot in the streets as of late, especially in Colorado. Back in 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) finalized a rule that would establish an experimental population of gray wolves in Colorado under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act. This rule stemmed from a statewide voter-led initiative that was passed in November 2020. This past September, the final environmental impact statement was published, which is a massive document outlining the potential impact of a proposed project on the environment/ecosystem of interest (this is required under NEPA, the

National Environmental Policy Act). This document is open access so if you are interested in it, you can find it on the USFWS website. No later than December 31st of this year, we are to expect a developed plan on the reintroduction and management of wolves in Colorado. Furthermore, statewide hearings will be held that will regard scientific, economic, and social considerations; public input will be periodically obtained to update the plan; and state funds will be used to assist livestock owners in preventing conflicts with gray wolves and pay fair compensation for livestock losses. This situation is fluid, but as of now it appears that Colorado is following in the footsteps of Yellowstone National Park almost three decades after their wolf reintroduction. Now might be a good time to address the elephant in the room, or rather the elephant in the Adirondack Mountains.



The Adirondacks have long been a discussed target of wolf reintroduction, and evidence suggests that wolves are attempting a natural recolonization to the Northeastern U.S. To keep things close to home, I will just discuss New York, but it is important to note that Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts are also in play here. As some of you may know, back in December of 2021, a wolf was shot near Cooperstown that was mistaken for an Eastern coyote. Nothing is preventing wolf populations in the Quebec province of Canada from dispersing South into New York and settling in the Adirondacks, granted it would take many years for a minimum viable population (the lowest number of individuals needed for a population to persist) to be established. This brings up a greater issue for wolves in New York. While they are protected under the Endangered Species Act (apart from the Northern Rocky Mountain populations in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming), New York has no management plan in place to protect wolves dispersing into the state. An established wolf population has been absent from New York since 1900, and without them, the Adirondacks are missing a key component of a fully functioning ecosystem.



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So, is reintroduction feasible? Not until New York establishes a plan to protect wolves that naturally make their way into the state. This is further complicated by the absence of a coyote bag limit in New York, since wolves are often mistaken for coyotes. After this is done, then the long, tumultuous process may begin. The USFWS would have to establish a proposition that would create an experimental wolf population in the Adirondack Mountains. This would be voted on by you and me on the back of your ballots come election season in some future November. Then, we would likely see some of the following steps take place: A plan to restore wolves in New York using the best scientific data available would be established (an Environmental Impact Statement would also be drafted and finalized), statewide hearings would be held to obtain public input, state funds would be distributed to



assist livestock owners in preventing and resolving conflicts between wolves and livestock, as well pay compensation for any livestock losses from wolves. Further, any restrictions on private landowners regarding land, water, or resource use would not be imposed. It is important to note this is all very simplified, and all these steps (and others not mentioned) would take time. Remember, the vote to reintroduce wolves to Colorado took place in November of 2020. While they are close, it is November of 2023 and there are still no wolves on the ground in Colorado. Conversations like this are inherently complex. There are many stakeholders in play and many varying interests to be considered.

There is an ecological niche open in the Adirondacks that can be filled by wolves. We know that a native guild of predators within ecosystems is a key driver to the functionality of ecosystems, including processes such as primary productivity and carbon cycling. But as with Yellowstone and now Colorado, for this to be successful, the interests and concerns of all who may be impacted by wolf reintroduction must be considered if an effective management plan is to be developed and implemented.



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)

Upcoming Special Programs

Winter with the Wolves

Celebrate the winter season & snow!

Dec. 10 11 am – 3 pm

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



**We will be closed for the holiday season and staff vacations from
December 18, 2023 – February 3, 2024.**

**We will reopen on Sundays beginning on Sunday, February 4, 2024
(weather pending; closings will be posted on website, Facebook, and voicemail)**