



Okwaho

HOWL CHRONICLES

The Wolf Mountain Nature Center

May 2025

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

So, it is (finally!) early spring here at Wolf Mountain. The snow and ice of the past six months like time lapse photography are transitioning into cool rain revealing the first subtle shades of green. The promise of renewal is awakening. On my walks about the Center grounds, I notice Grandmother Maple tree's buds coming alive (an amazing story of her survival!), the shoots of tulips and daffodils, the opening of pussy willow buds, the yellowing of the forsythia bushes, and the songs of birds and frogs. All this means another thing: mud season! Mud on boots, clothing, tractor tires, tools, animals, and yes, sometimes tracked onto the cabin rugs.

"How are things at Wolf Mountain?" I am asked—busy and about to get crazy busy!

We are anticipating several wolf pups and fox kits this spring and are busy with preparations for their arrival.

After years of planning and securing funding, our new wolf habitat area's construction is set to begin by May 1st. In addition, thanks to a generous grant from the RC Smith Foundation, our new red fox habitat is set to begin construction as well.

Thanks to the efforts of Tom from County Line Tree Farm (and Dean, one of our Caretakers,) several large newly planted trees have been added to not only beautify the grounds, but provide shade to animals and additional nesting space for birds and squirrels.

Would you or your group like to join us with landscaping, basic construction, chain saw work, hauling gravel and lumber, or sharing knowledge and skills of creating and installing a small waterfall/pond feature to an animal habitat? Can you donate some time and a bulldozer to help clear future fence lines and/or do some driveway repairs? Are you passionate

about the forest and maintaining existing trails and creating new ones? Perhaps leading an educational tour and chatting with visitors is more your thing.

We have lots of opportunities for folks to help out either for a day, a small multi-day project, or even longer term. Please contact Will at the Center (evenings are best) at 607-627-6784.

After six months of winter, I am looking forward to t-shirt weather and the feel of Grandfather Sun upon my face. So amazing to be alive and a part of this life!

Ah ho! Walk in balance with Mother Earth...

Will



Director Dialog...Erin Lord-Astles

The Top Three Mammalian Ecosystem Engineers of New York State



Photo Credit: Pam Mennis 2022

It finally feels like spring! Peak bird migration is well on its way, the frogs and toads are in full chorus, and flowers and leaf buds are popping. And I have been aching since this previous fall to get back out onto the water in my kayak. Grateful that those days are upon us! Whenever I head out into some remote stream or marshy area in my region of the Finger Lakes, I always watch for New York State's official mammal, the **American beaver** (*Castor canadensis*).

I have a particular affinity for this animal as I spent some time working with a beaver in human care when I was a Utica Zookeeper. I also spent a lot of time studying beaver and teaching others about their value back when I was a K-12 educator at the Finger Lakes Community College Muller Field Station on Honeoye Lake, NY. Every time I head out on the kayak, I remember the lesson plan I taught to students on the Top Three Mammalian Ecosystem Engineers in New York State using beaver as the core concept.

American beaver leave a lot of evidence of their presence on a landscape, most obviously the creation of the **dam** and subsequent formation of the beaver **impoundment** (aka beaver pond). Beaver are **allogenic ecosystem engineers** that create, maintain, and modify habitat by mechanical means. During the fall season, beaver spend a lot of their time felling trees not only to supply building materials for their **lodges** and dams, but also to stock their winter food **cache**, which is anchored near an underwater entrance to the lodge. Beaver do not hibernate in winter, so the goal of the beaver dam is to maintain water levels deep enough to avoid freezing all the way through in winter, that way a family of beaver can access their underwater cache during even if the surface is locked in ice.



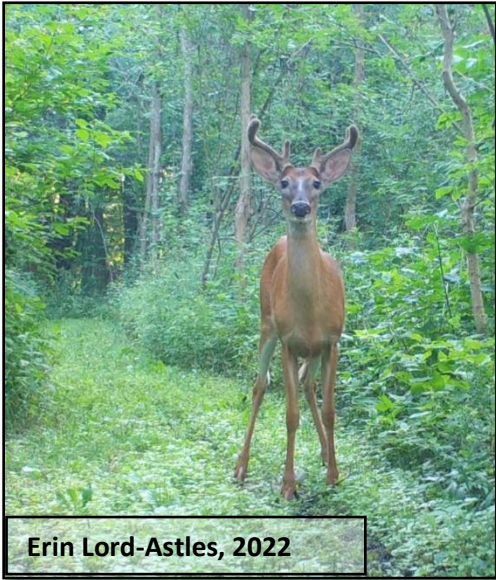
Erin Lord-Astles, 2021

Springtime often typically shows an increase in territorial behavior, mainly through creation of **scent mounds**. These scent mounds are a form of visual and olfactory (sight and smell) communication where beaver will dredge mud from the bottom of their waterbody, pile it up on shore, and deposit castoreum from anal glands at the base of their tail. These scent mounds are meant to let other beaver know, particularly dispersing juvenile, that said territory is occupied. Beaver are considered **keystone species** because they create rich ecosystems that provide habitat for a diversity of other mammals, birds, reptile, amphibian, fish, and invertebrates. Beaver may alter plant communities through **selective herbivory** by eliminating flood intolerant plants and preferred food items.



Erin Lord-Astles, 2009

continued from previous page



Erin Lord-Astles, 2022

White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) also can alter a plant community and the entire structure of a forest if their population grows too large and they **over-browse** a landscape. Not only can an overabundance of deer result in starvation and disease for the deer herd, but over-browsing can also have a cascading effect on the biodiversity of plants and animals that might occupy a deer-stripped habitat. Historically, deer populations were naturally controlled by **apex predators** like cougars and wolves. It was the job of these predators to thin the herd to fit the habitat. Humans have since usurped this role by extirpating these top predators from most of the northeast. Though smaller **mesopredators** like eastern coyotes (*Canis latrans*) have moved into to occupy wolves' former territory, it is humans who have removed nature's most effective deer herd trimming tools and now must establish sustainable harvests in their absence.

Finally, **Humans** (*Homo sapiens*) are the most ecologically significant ecosystem engineer there is. In the northeast US, we see examples of this through many decades of habitat destruction, deforestation, draining and filling of wetlands for agriculture, and urbanization. We have produced excessive pollution, engaged in over-exploitation of resources, experimented with introduction of harmful invasive species. We have directly eliminated keystone species like beaver; over-trapping in the 19th century resulted in only a handful left in ADKs by 1840, it took decades of reintroductions and protection for populations to recover. We have removed predators like gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) and eastern cougar (*Puma concolor*) who have a significant role in maintaining ecosystem health by regulating herbivory, and we have indirectly impacted other species of amphibians, songbirds, bats, honeybees, etc. through our various other forms of ecological meddling.



Erin Lord-Astles, 2022

Nature is often a self-correcting system when we allow it to function as it has for hundreds of thousands of years. But we still must accept that no other creature in the history of Earth has had a greater impact, for better or for worse, on local and global environments than human beings. It is because of this influence that we humans should continue to improve our stewardship attitudes and practices. We not only have a responsibility to correct the mistakes of our past, but if we are dutiful humans we will work together to minimize the fallout of future generations as well.



Beaver



White Tail Deer



Human

Foxes

Pam Mennis, Animal Care Specialist

Red Foxes to join our Center!

Exciting news to share...as this newsletter is being written, Caretakers Peg & Karley are enroute to pick up fox kits who will become the newest members of the Wolf Mountain family! We will be welcoming four red foxes; two reds and two silvers (who will initially be black in color.) Sounds confusing with all those colors, but, like the gray wolves, red fox species actually come in various colors. One thing all red fox have in common is the white tip at the end of the tail; gray foxes have a black tail tip.



Pam with gray foxes Fern & Trillium

Our five-week-old reds will be named Nutmeg (male) & Saffron (female). The three-week-old silver kits will be called Buckwheat (male) & Brambles (female). As is our protocol with new babies, the kits will be housed in the main Caretaker cabin for several weeks with round the clock care where they will be monitored for growth, feedings, and development. As they grow and develop skills and confidence, they will be transitioned to their new forever home in a brand-new fox habitat near our existing gray and arctic fox habitats. Until that time, the babies will be off-exhibit to visitors, but we will post photos and videos on our Facebook site so you can watch as they grow! Of course, any donations you could offer to assist with their care, vaccines and veterinary checks, or construction of new habitat are greatly appreciated—see more in our Head Caretaker’s blurb at the beginning of this newsletter or review our wishes & wants list on page 10

Coyotes

Dave Conner, Head Coyote Care Specialist

Eastern Coyote’s Spring Behaviors

Pup season for coyotes, and many wild animals, is in the springtime. The family unit is made up of the breeding pair and perhaps a single offspring from the previous season who will assist with hunting, territorial duties, and caring for the new litter (the remaining pups have already dispersed to find their own mate and territories.) Coyotes breed in the winter between the months of January and March. Their offspring are born 63 days later, often in April or May. Pups are born in secluded well-hidden dens tucked in thick brush, rock outcrops, or under fallen trees and will remain there until mama coyote deems it time to venture out and see the world.



It is not uncommon to see a coyote during the day in spring. While the mother is tending to the pups, the male will go off searching for food for both the female and the pups until they leave the denning area. Of course, caution should be used when hiking during pup season; like most creatures, parents will defend the safety of their offspring. Occasionally a coyote may come close to you while you and perhaps your dog are out hiking. Usually, the coyote is trying to divert you and lead you away from its den. This behavior is known as escorting. When being escorted, you should immediately leash/pick up your dog and leave the area without running. Hazing a coyote during pup season is not recommended as the situation could quickly escalate and turn the encounter into a defensive and dangerous situation. In areas known to have coyote activity, it is best to avoid the area for a few months and stick to city parks and open places. Later in the summer, coyotes typically abandon their dens and behaviors become much less protective and defensive.

Bats of New York State

Niki Cesar Tracchia, Wildlife Advocate

Did you know New York State is home to nine different bat species! Six species of cave bats and three species of tree bats! These odd and beautiful friends of the night have a huge environmental benefit: they are nature’s pest control! Bats consume an incredible amount of insects, which can help reduce the number of pesticides used on crops, and prevent invasive insects from wreaking havoc on our native insects and environment overall.



New York State’s Cave Bats:

- ❖ Little Brown Bat: most common, can be observed flying low over water during summer months. Also found in buildings during spring and fall when weather is the warmer. This species is listed on the IUCN endangered species list due to “white nose syndrome.”
- ❖ Big Brown Bat: largest of cave bats, which are more tolerant of cold temperatures. Like the Little Brown Bat, they can also be found inside buildings during warmer spring and fall temperatures.
- ❖ Indiana Bat: federally endangered species distributed across the state in very small numbers
- ❖ Tri-colored Bat: has yellow-orange fur and can be observed chasing insects among the tree tops.
- ❖ Northern Long-eared Bat: mostly out during summer months, recognizable by its large ears and high frequency calls.
- ❖ Small-footed Bat: smallest species in the state! Has a distinctive black mask and long fur. Also listed on the IUCN endangered species list due to “White Nose Syndrome.”

New York State’s Tree Bats:

- ❖ Eastern Red Bat: is a migratory species that roosts low in trees in dense foliage. They are best seen late May through July in early evening. Historically migrate in large flocks.
- ❖ Hoary Bat: largest of all bats seen in New York State! Most often seen in the Adirondack Mountains from May through October; another migratory bat.
- ❖ Silver-haired Bat: is mostly solitary, and may roost in small groups. Is one of the rarest bat species in the state and is also migratory. Visit New York State May through September.



This little guy, poisoned by pesticides, was brought to a rehab facility to be given a chance. Sadly, he did not survive.

Pesticide use is detrimental to the well-being of our native bats. Pesticides weaken bats’ immune systems, making them more vulnerable to diseases like white-nose syndrome. Pesticide use can also lead to habitat loss and reduce the abundance of bat food sources—insects!



Tales from the Voyageurs Wolf Project: My Wolf Encounter of a Lifetime

by Alex Gross, Caretaker Assistant & Aspiring Conservation Biologist

Since January, I have continued my time working with the Voyageurs Wolf Project during the winter field season. This winter was memorable for a plethora of reasons, but I wanted to tell a story from one particular day I had in the field. A day that I will remember forever, and a wolf encounter that I will always hold close to my heart.

It was the morning of January 27th when I got my plans for the day. My coworker and I were to be dropped off via snowmobile on the Kabetogama Peninsula (part of Voyageurs National Park) and go our separate ways maintaining some trail cameras. We parked on the ice road on Kabetogama Lake and waited for our other coworker to arrive on snowmobile. The ice on the lake grows so deep this time of the year that there is a road on the lake maintained by the park service that you can drive your car on and not worry about the ice breaking. Before long, my other coworker arrived, dropped me off at Lost Bay, and I set off. It was pretty overcast with the sun peeking out from time to time. Temperatures probably sat around 25 degrees F, though the constant wind throughout the day made it feel between 10-15 degrees Fahrenheit. All things considered; that's a fairly warm day for us at that time of the year. The trail that I used that day took me right through the heart of the Listening Point pack's territory (see map for an idea of where this is), which makes up the central and eastern parts of the Kabetogama Peninsula, a very remote part of the park that is relatively inaccessible.



Breeding female of Listening Point pack

As I began my hike, what I started to notice very quickly was how often wolves were using the trail I was on. There were so many wolf tracks in the snow, as well as urine scent marks on rocks and trees. That's the really nice thing about having snow on the ground in the winter vs. the summer. In some instances, you could get at least a minimal idea of what might have been taking place in an area before you arrive. Nonetheless, I found it quite cool that I was following these wolf tracks and seeing all their scent-marking posts. It felt like I was following in the pack and traversing their territory in the same way they would (minus the periodic pausing to urinate on rocks of course). Wolves are like us in some ways. One of those ways is they like using trails because it is far easier for traveling than going off-trail, and that was clearly being reflected that day. During the hike out, I encountered many different habitats. I passed a couple lakes, many beaver-modified meadows and ponds, walked on rock outcrops and through mature forests and bogs. Because of its inaccessibility, I always like to appreciate my time doing field work in the National Park as much as I can. It is always a joy to see mature forests, untouched habitats, and changing landscapes. One second, I'll be in a mature cedar forest, the next second, I'm in a mature spruce bog, and so on. It is so cool and interesting to see how habitats change right before your eyes.

continued on next page



Breeding male of Listening Point pack

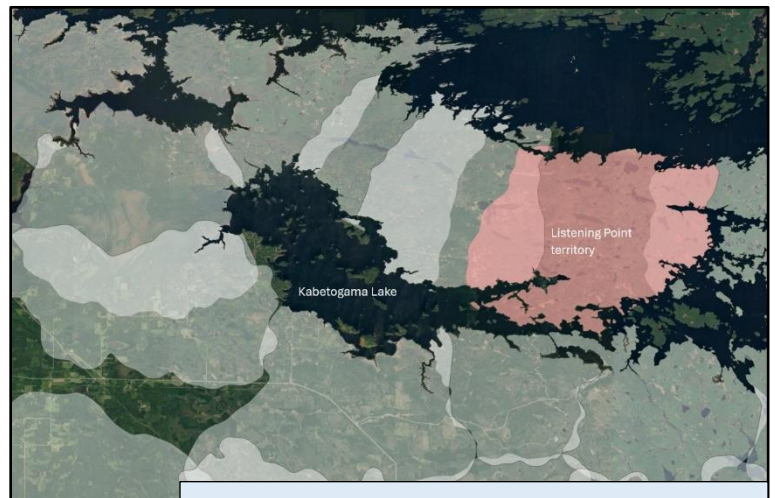


Breeding male of Listening Point pack zoomed out. This picture gives good scale as to how big this beaver lodge was!

Between 1:00-1:30 pm, I reached my third trail camera of the day. This camera was on the trail just below a beaver dam and next to a beaver drainage. We like to set cameras near, and even on, beaver dams in the winter because wolves will frequently use the dams and frozen ponds to navigate the landscape. I went through my usual routine of camera maintenance, which includes checking battery life, how full the SD card is, going through the footage and taking notes of any videos with multiple wolves in it (for our pack counts), confirming the camera settings are how we like them, and making sure the camera is set well. I wrapped up checking the camera and walked up the dam to look over the pond. My heart skipped a beat. Just 80 meters out on the pond, standing on

top of the beaver lodge was a wolf, eyes locked with mine. It was aware of my presence, but didn't seem to mind me very much as it didn't run at the sight of me. After a few moments of shock, I slowly lowered my backpack to take out my camera, which I haul into the field with me for potential rare moments like

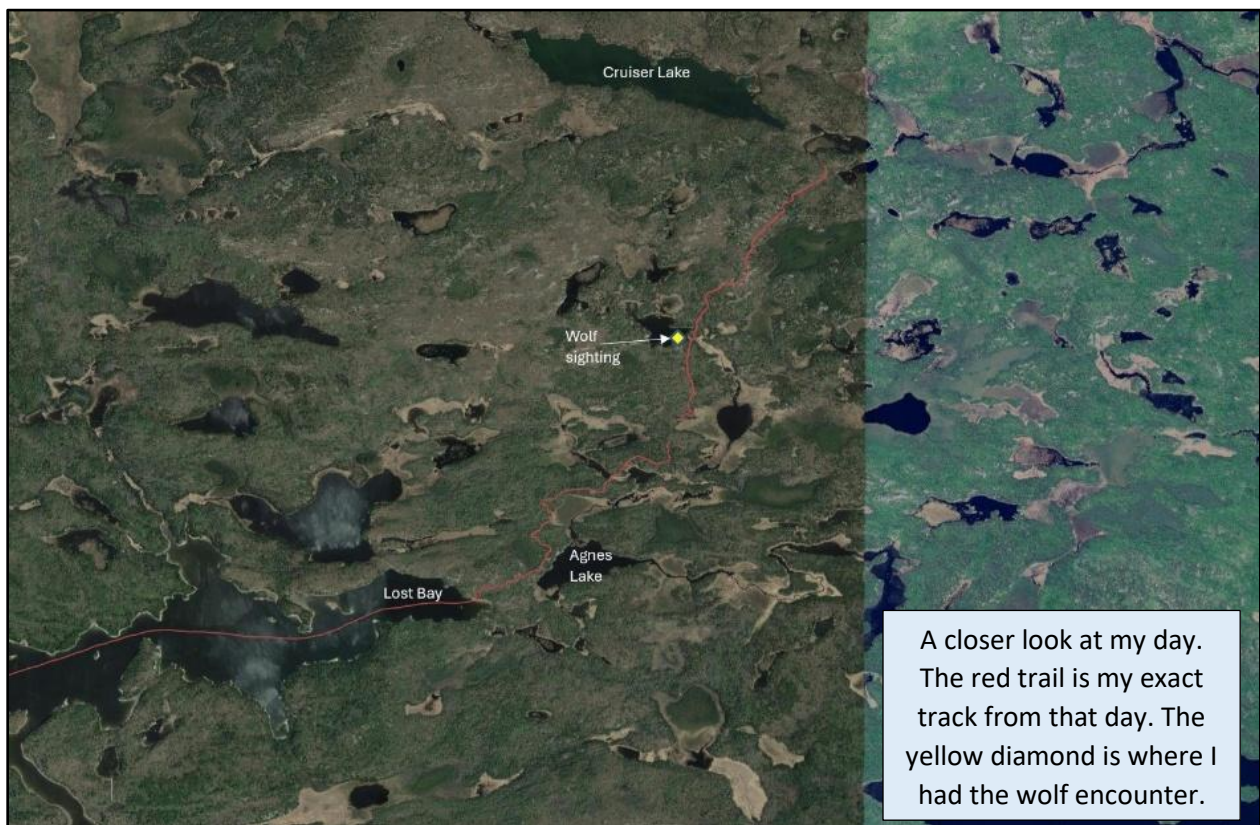
this. While I was doing this, I noticed there was a second wolf next to the lodge, just sniffing around and investigating. I got my camera out, turned it on, and lay down on the dam just firing away pictures, while pausing to watch them with my own eyes. I probably had a minute with them before the wolf on the lodge ran down it and off into the woods. The second wolf ran farther down the pond, which revealed a third wolf that I didn't see initially because it was behind the lodge. The third wolf followed the other farther down the pond. And then it was over. My chest felt heavy with adrenaline, but not nervous adrenaline. I was excited, and downright emotional. It was pure magic. A feeling that is truly hard to describe. I'm not exaggerating when I say I was probably grinning ear to ear for the rest of that day. Funny enough, the wolf that was on the lodge ran toward the direction I was headed. Barely 10 minutes later while I was walking through the woods, I saw that same wolf again. This time it spooked off immediately at the sight of me. We probably both scared each other half to death. I returned to Lost Bay around 3:40pm with the sun now out and getting low, and awaited my snowmobile chariot back to the car, unable to shake the smile off my face since I saw those three wolves.



This is a map of part of our study area. I saw the wolves in the red highlighted territory.

When I got back home, I entered all my data and went immediately to my camera to edit my photos and potentially ID the wolves I saw. The wolf that was standing on top of the beaver lodge was the breeding male of the Listening Point pack, and the wolf next to the lodge sniffing around was the breeding female of the pack. I didn't get any looks at the third wolf other than its tail running away, but it was likely either a pup that was born in April 2024, a yearling born in April 2023, or an older subordinate. Regardless, there is a fairly good chance the breeding pair are the parents of that third wolf.

Wolf encounters like that in our study area are remarkably rare. Because so much of our study area is boreal forest, we don't have the pleasure of seeing wolves anywhere close to the same rate as say the Yellowstone Wolf Project for instance. It quite literally boils down to being at the right place, at the right time. In this encounter, the wind was blowing in from the southwest, and I came up from the south. If I didn't have the benefit of being downwind of those wolves, I surely would not have seen them as they would have left at the scent of me. I reflect a lot on that day and how it made me feel. Joy, excitement, and emotional are just a few words, but words alone cannot describe feeling. The feeling I felt at the initial sight of the breeding male of the Listening Point pack standing on that beaver lodge is one I will never forget. I love the work I do, but I would be lying if I said it wasn't both physically and mentally exhausting at times. During those times, I like to revisit the foundation of why I decided to pursue wildlife biology as a career. That foundation is and will always be, because wildlife is cool. Wolves (and large carnivores altogether) are cool and fascinating, and I want to learn as much as I can about them and share what I learn with people, so that they may appreciate them in a similar way I do. Encounters like that are a great reminder of the beauty of nature, as well as its fragility should we continue on our current trajectory.



Lost Bay in the evening when I returned. The end of a remarkable day!



Capturing Wildlife on Camera

Rose Pass, Animal Caretaker

Scientists, wildlife lovers, hunters and landowners alike use trail cameras for a number of reasons. Whether it's for data collection, keeping track of the bucks during hunting season, just for fun, or even security purposes they can be a great tool for many. You may wonder, well how do they know where to place them when there are so many different possibilities? It all really comes down to a few key rules to follow.



First you need to understand how trail cameras work. They are a small compact camera that uses SD cards that are set off when something is moving by or around them. They are able to detect changes in heat signatures to be able to tell when movement is present, but sometimes false triggers occur from branches, leaves, wind and other elements therefore making placement choice an important factor to reduce these false triggers, though sometimes you cannot avoid it. Now once the camera is triggered it takes either a photo or video depending on what setting you decide to program it to. You also have the option for it to take multiple photos and videos which gets you the best results often times.

Now let's talk about how to get the best results by diving into the three rules to follow for the best results. First thing is before you go out and just place your trail camera anywhere you are going to want to find areas that animals are likely going to be traveling through. The places I often like to look for are along fresh water sources, well used trails like deer trails where you can tell animals are traveling (looks for scat, tracks and other signs of use), fence lines, woodland/ field edges and areas where easy food sources can be available. Next, after you find a good spot and tree to place it on, you want to make sure the camera is not facing north. This is because you don't want to over expose your photos, and it can also make your camera more prone to false triggers. The third rule which can be a lot of trial and error is the height of your camera and the area your camera is covering. Height is important because if it's at the wrong height you will not get the desired photos you are looking for. I usually think about how big the animals I might get photos of are, how big of an area my camera will cover and consider that in how high I place my camera. If I know there are smaller mammals like skunks, raccoon, fisher, and foxes it can go a little lower. But if I know there are taller animals like deer and coyotes, I put it just a tad higher so I can get as much as possible. Another factor I might consider is the slope of the area. If I have the camera facing downhill, I put it a little lower and if it's facing uphill, I put it slightly higher so it can get the downhill, but not too much otherwise results won't be good. Again, choosing the correct height is often where people have the most trouble in the beginning so it can be a lot of repositioning when you go out to check the SD card. Now that you have the basics of how to get the most out of your trail cameras go out and have some fun and see what cool wildlife you can capture!



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!

We have begun landscaping and construction/maintenance type tasks. Having certain skills in these areas is helpful, but not required as we will train you as most tasks are fairly simple to master. Please contact us 607-627-6784 or twmncwolves@yahoo.com if you, your family, your work place, etc would like to sign up to help! Work days occur both weekdays and weekends. Please note all workers must be at least 16 years old. Thanks in advance!

Animal Care
 Metal "pooper-scoopers"
 Farmer's Dog moist food (frozen)
 FreshPet Dog Food
 Mazuri exotic canine kibble
 6' round/oval galvanized water troughs
 Commercial grade garden hose (3/4")
 Gift Cards: Tractor Supply, Country Max
 Gift Cards: Chewy.com, Harbor Freight
 Bags of cedar or pine chips

Office/Classroom
 Toilet Paper
 Paper Towels
 Hand Sanitizer
 Non-latex gloves (large/XL)
 AA batteries
 Gift Cards: Staples, Wal-Mart

Landscaping/Maintenance
 Picnic tables &/or benches
 Gift Cards: Lowe's, Curtis Lumber
 Working push mower
 Contractor size trash bags
 Salt/sand spreader for pickup truck
 Use of bulldozer
 RTV or ATV cart
 Perennials

Wolf Puppy & Fox Kit Care
 Blankets (throw size or smaller)
 Towels (any size)
 Paper towels
 Baby wipes
 Hand Sanitizer
 Ground meats (beef, turkey)
 Taste of the Wild puppy kibble
 Eggs (we scramble them for little ones)
 Monetary donations (to aid with vaccines & exams)



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 January & February)	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)
Cash only for admission! Cards /cash accepted in gift shop