Arctic Fox Aurora

HOWL CHRONICLES

The Wolf Mountain Nature Center

November 2025

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

Year in review…

For this last edition of the Howl Chronicles for 2025, we have changed the format a bit to allow us to reflect upon our new, huge red fox project and the raising of four new kits which consumed a great deal of our time this season.

A visit to the Center usually gives off a peaceful and calm vibe, which is exactly what we want for folks in order to open hearts and minds to feel the spirit of the wolf. Though that is typically the feeling at the Center, there are many days where there is much hustle and bustle to tame growing vegetation, repair driveway washouts from storms, fill holes dug by an exuberant animal, halt all activities to pick up road kill deer for the wolves, build enclosures for new arrivals, host 85 third graders for an entire day, fix machinery,…..you get the idea.

Thankfully, we have an absolutely fabulous team of Animal Care Specialists and volunteers who are ready at a moment's notice to take on any task, planned or unexpected, with enthusiasm and dedication! In fact, many of our staff have been helping at the Center for ten years or more!

Next season marks our 20th year of being open to the public! When the Center first began, there were those who never thought we would make it: too far off the beaten path, no paid staff, no philanthropic supporters, the list went on, yet here we are: a gorgeous hilltop location with over 70 acres of breathtaking views, a solid volunteer and intern program, and folks who have been making regular contributions via funding and in material goods. We continue to grow, expand, make improvements, and create new programs. So too, has our animal inventory multiplied. When we opened in 2006, we presented two Arctic/Alaskan wolves, Nakoa & Natani. Today, the Center is home to fourteen wolves of various gray wolf subspecies, three eastern coyotes, three Arctic foxes, two gray foxes, two red foxes, and two silver foxes. "And a partridge in a pear tree…" Just kidding, but we do have oodles of wild birds that nest on or near the Center including a heron who eats the fish we stocked, some noisy ravens who steal wolf food when they can, and several hawks and bald eagles.

Enjoy our newsletter, have a safe holiday season and we look forward to our 20th anniversary in 2026!

Ah ho,
Walk in balance on Mother Earth

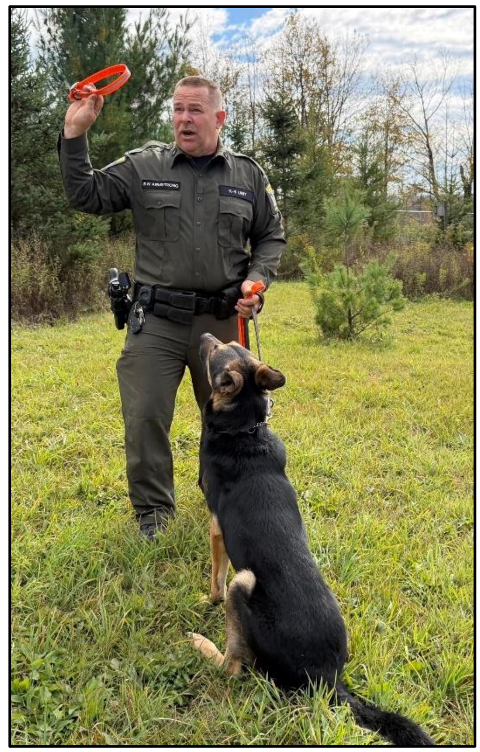
Will & Pam

Throwback pic to 2017:
Pam & Will with Cypress & Tauriel

19th annual "Honoring the Spirit of the Wolf" celebration

Sunday, October 12, 2025

A beautiful day to celebrate the wolf! Changing autumn leaves were at their peak adding to the beauty of the hill. Our parking lot was completely full (and organized thanks to Penny from our local fire department's auxiliary, her crew, and a few of our own workers!). Guests were fed by Kandi's Kitchen, entertained by music from the Four Corners String Band, and Jim Okey's magic, and enjoyed presentations from the Sled Dogs of Smokey Hill, our local NYS DEC officer, Brett Armstrong & his K9, Falcon, staff from Friends of Rogers (environmental center) who dressed in animal costumes and provided lots of cool information, and our own Native American drumming group. In between all that, the animals of the Center were given some pumpkin enrichment treats!



Foxes

Red Fox exhibit is open!

Peg Fuller, Head Fox Care Specialist

Red, White, & Gray

We have another great reason for you to come visit Wolf Mountain Nature Center before we close for a winter break, you can visit the red foxes! Nutmeg, Saffron, Buckwheat, and Brambles have recently opened their home to visitors and are eager to welcome you. The new red fox enclosure has a nice viewing area where the foxes can see you and you can see the foxes. Nutmeg and Saffron are the red variety of red foxes and Buckwheat and Brambles are the silver variety of red foxes. Nutmeg is usually the first to say hello up close, quickly followed by Buckwheat who is also very excited to meet new people. Saffron and Brambles sometimes take a few minutes to warm up to the idea of new people, but before long they are usually seen wagging their beautiful tails and sometimes screeching a hello in fox language. Red foxes are not climbing foxes, that is the gray foxes' job to climb. But our agile and very nimble red foxes are practicing on a regular basis to show how they can master the skill of fence climbing. It is not quite the same as the climbing Fern and Trillium can do as gray foxes. With rotating wrists and semi-retractable claws, the gray fox can laterally climb to heights in the wild that red fox (and other foxes) could not even imagine. Gray foxes will climb to the tops of trees to sleep, raid birds' nests, or hunt for other meals. Red foxes will seize an opportunity to go higher by simpler means, a partially fallen log, steps leading to a balcony or similar man-made structures, or for our red foxes, easily climbing fencing or ramps placed for their convenience.

Not to be ignored, the Arctic foxes, Avalanche, Aurora, and Snowflake (in her off-exhibit retirement home) are dressed to impress with their very thick winter coats. Their winter coasts are coming in nicely and will remain white until springtime. So even if you miss an opportunity to see them this year, come visit the end of February or in March and they will still have the winter coat that is vital to their survival in the wild. Not to be outdone for the cuteness factor, Aurora and Avalanche encourage you to ooh and ahh over them. Many visitors quickly understand their signal that they want food delivered now, if not quicker, as they scratch and lick the gate the caretakers use to enter and, more importantly, deliver the food. They also think that all visitors must visit at least once in the summer and once in the winter to see how they can look adorable in both their coats. Summer is a grayish-black thin, light coat and winter is much larger, by about 2 inches, white coat that they are known for.

No matter which foxes you are coming to visit, you will not be disappointed. Like all of the enclosures, as you stand and watch you will see more of the animal's behavior, even if they are napping, they are cute to watch. All the volunteers are happy to talk about all the foxes and even help you locate Fern and Trillium if they are relaxing in the elevated portion of their enclosure.

Our foxes eat well!! Omnivorous creatures, this typical meal consists of broccoli, green beans, salmon, crab, and mini meat sticks.

Nutmeg

The initial space after tree removal and before construction.

Inspired by Head Caretaker Will's imagination and thanks to a matching grant from RC Smith Foundation, a dive into our savings, and lots of serious volunteered hard labor, we were able to complete the new Red Fox exhibit and habitat space. Much gratitude goes to all who contributed in some way, but especially to Maddy, Kaylee, Peg, Gen, Dean, Bill, and Jason for their countless hours during the heat of summer for assisting us with this new endeavor. All four red foxes settled into their new home almost immediately and love the huge space for playing and exploring!

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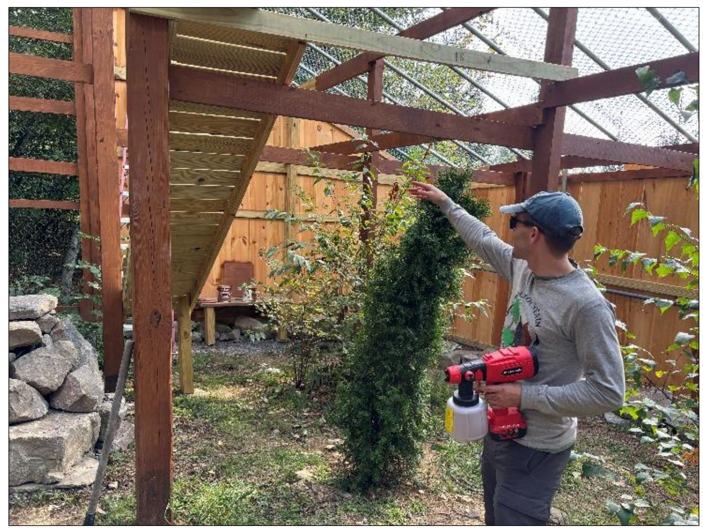
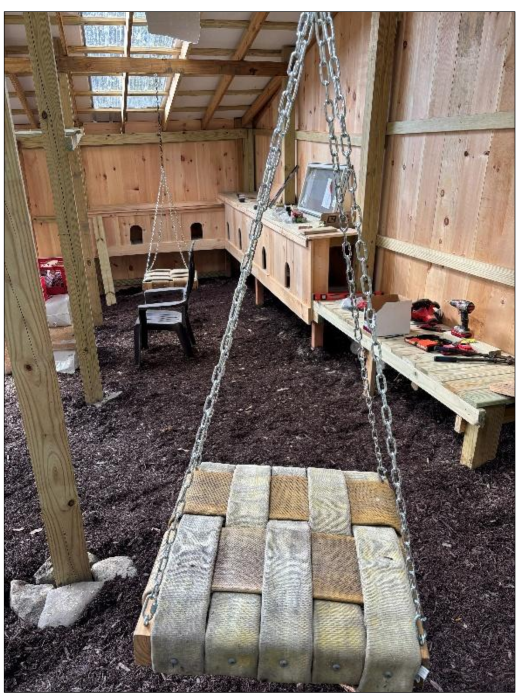




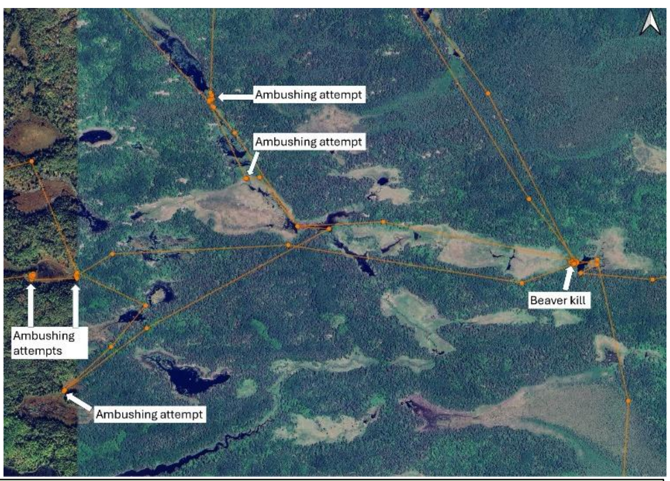
An exhausted Will gets checked out by a concerned fox!

The Beaver Hunters of the Greater Voyageurs Ecosystem, MN

Alex Gross, Caretaker Assistant &
Wolf Biologist at Voyageur's Wolf Project

If wolves were to be described as specialists in hunting a certain group of species, most people would say ungulates. After all, wolves are dubbed as 'cursorial predators' for a reason, as they actively travel long distances to find and catch their prey. Decades of research have yielded extensive information on the predator-prey dynamics of wolves and their ungulate prey, including white-tailed deer, moose, elk, musk oxen, mountain sheep, and more. This is what makes wolves hunting beavers all the more interesting.

Wolf-beaver predator-prey dynamics have been poorly understood until recently, and much of what we know comes from the Voyageurs Wolf Project. We study the wolf population in the Greater Voyageurs Ecosystem, MN (hereafter GVE), which is a southern boreal forest ecosystem consisting of dense deciduous, coniferous, and mixed forests intermixed with plentiful wetlands, bogs and lakes.



A map of GPS locations from wolf 'B2L,' where each orange point is a GPS location. Here, you can see just how many locations are near or at beaver ponds

So how do wolves hunt and kill beavers? Wolves in the GVE will switch from using cursorial hunting strategies for hunting ungulates to ambushing strategies when hunting beavers (Gable et al. 2016, 2018, 2021; Bump et al. 2022). Specifically, wolves use wait-in-ambush strategies, where they will bed down next to beaver features with fresh beaver sign on them and wait for beavers to pass them (Gable et al. 2016, 2018). Pretty interesting when you consider that wolves are well-known cursorial predators that are generally not known for ambushing their prey!

Wolves will wait-in-ambush near all kinds of beaver features, for example, on feeding trails, at and below beaver dams, on feeding canals, on the shorelines and edges of waterways that beavers use regularly, and more. Beavers have highly developed olfactory senses (sense of smell), but very poor vision. As such, wolves will choose their ambushing locations to avoid being detected olfactorily by beavers, and close to beaver habitat features where beavers can't detect them visually if they remain motionless (Gable et al. 2021).

Three examples of trail cam footage we have captured of wolves carrying freshly killed beavers. Photo credit: Voyageurs Wolf Project

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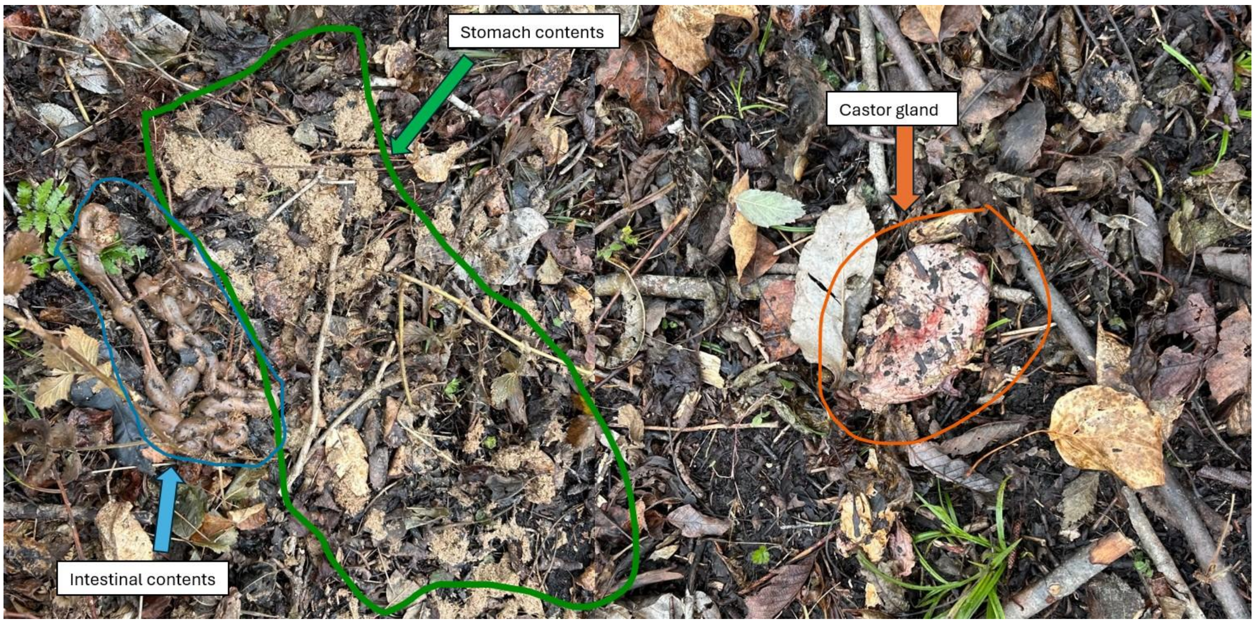
So, what is left at these beaver kills? This varies from kill to kill and based on the time between the kill and when we visit it, but there are usually consistencies. We normally see beaver stomach contents at most of our kills (see picture below). Like the rumen in deer, wolves do not consume the stomach contents of beavers. The stomach contents look a lot like wood chips, which makes sense because beavers cut trees. You also find castor glands at kills, which are located between the anus and the external genitals of beavers. Castor glands produce castoreum, which is used by beavers to mark territory, and used by us in the production of perfumes and other miscellaneous flavoring. Wolves also don't consume these glands, so they are frequently found at kill sites. Otherwise, what we find is random. Bone fragments, tufts of beaver hair, vertebrae, and if we are lucky, maybe the skull or lower mandibles. We also find disturbances in the vegetation (flattened grass, kicked up dirt, etc.) that is associated with the all the time a wolf (or wolves) spends at the kill.



Photos of stomach/intestinal contents and a castor gland from a of wolf-killed beaver. As mentioned above, beaver stomach contents have that classic 'woodchippy' look to them. Castor glands vary in look, shape, and size, but the one common theme with them is their unique smell! Photo credit: Claire Sudol

Wolves in the GVE tend to put out the most beaver ambushing attempts and make the most kills during the ice-free period. During the winter, beavers are huddled up in their lodges, so wolves do not attempt to hunt them and kill mostly deer. To put it bluntly, a beaver killed by a wolf in the winter is one super unlucky beaver. However, when winter turns to spring and the ice on ponds melt, we start to see more kills and ambushing attempts again for two big reasons. 1) Beavers are coming out of the water to make cuts again where they are more vulnerable to predation, and 2) this is the period where we see young beavers dispersing from their natal ponds, which also increases their vulnerability to predation.

However, once we get into late May and deer fawns are born, most wolves switch away from hunting beavers because newborn fawns are now abundant, available, and vulnerable to wolf predation. Further, beavers spend a lot of the summer foraging on aquatic vegetation where they can remain safely in their ponds, so they become less vulnerable/available to wolves than in other months.

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We see the highest number of beaver ambushing attempts and kills in the fall. This is because beavers start to make all their necessary winter preparations during this period, including fortifying their dams and lodges, and prepping their food stores for the upcoming winter. This involves them coming out onto land more often and farther from the safety of their ponds to make more and larger cuts (see pictures below), which increases their vulnerability to predation. Wolves take complete advantage of this and spend much more time at active beaver ponds putting out ambushing attempts on beavers.

I just want to end with a few numbers to demonstrate how prevalent this behavior is in the GVE. During the ice-free season, beavers can make up to 42% of wolf pack diets, and up to 83% of individual diets (Moayeri 2013, Gable et al. 2017, 2018,). In other words, some wolves rely almost entirely on beavers from spring to fall. Pretty impressive for a cursorial predator. A natural follow up question to this is how does wolf-beaver dynamics impact ecosystems, especially since beavers are ecosystem engineers that modify habitats considerably? That is a whole different conversation that I will save for another newsletter article. For now, I will leave you all with this: it is pretty cool to think about the adaptive ability of wolves. Here is a predator that largely uses cursorial strategies to hunt and capture its prey, that can readily switch to other hunting strategies in response to shifts in the availability of its prey.

When beavers stay in their ponds (like the one pictured), they are largely invulnerable to wolf predation. However, as cold weather nears and they start prepping for winter, they venture farther onto land to make larger cuts (like the trees pictured), increasing their risk predation from wolves.

Sources:

1) Moayeri, M. (2013). *Reconstructing the summer diet of wolves in a complex multi-ungulate system in northern Manitoba, Canada*. University of Manitoba.

2) Gable, T. D., Windels, S. K., Bruggink, J. G., & Homkes, A. T. (2016). Where and how wolves (Canis lupus) kill beavers (Castor canadensis). *PLoS One*, *11*(12), e0165537.

3) Gable, T. D., Stanger, T., Windels, S. K., & Bump, J. K. (2018). Do wolves ambush beavers? Video evidence for higher-order hunting strategies. *Ecosphere*, *9*(3), e02159.

4) Gable, T. D., Homkes, A. T., Johnson-Bice, S. M., Windels, S. K., & Bump, J. K. (2021). Wolves choose ambushing locations to counter and capitalize on the sensory abilities of their prey. *Behavioral Ecology*, *32*(2), 339-348.

5) Bump, J., Gable, T., Johnson-Bice, S., Homkes, A., Freund, D., Windels, S., & Chakrabarti, S. (2022). Predator personalities alter ecosystem services. *Frontiers in Ecology & the Environment*, *20*(5).

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”
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
Old canvas type fire hoses (no nozzles)

Office/Classroom

Toilet Paper
Paper Towels
Hand Sanitizer
Non-latex gloves (large/XL)
AA batteries
Gift Cards: Staples, Wal-Mart
Contractor size trash bags

Landscaping/Maintenance

Picnic tables &/or benches
Gift Cards: Lowe’s, Curtis Lumber
Working push mower
RTV or ATV cart
STIHL MSA300 Chain saw & battery
STIHL FSA86R Trimmer & battery

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2026 begins our 20th season! We have already begun discussions and plans for changes, new programs, extended camping experiences, new shirt designs, and so much more! Of course, favorite programs will continue to happen as well. Visit our website to see dates as we add them.
www.TheWolfMountainNatureCenter.org

Who remembers Nakoa & Natani from 2006?

Don’t forget, sponsoring an animal is a great way to support the Center and help care for the critters! Available in our gift shop or on-line, yearly sponsorships come in two levels: Alpha $50 and Omega $25

Visit website for additional information

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2025 Open Hours and Admission Rates

*Last admission is 30 minutes prior to closing time.

We will be closed Sunday, November 16, 2025

But reopen Sundays after that through December 14

(weather permitting of course: PLEASE call or check website before coming out to make sure weather has not forced us to close unexpectedly!)

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