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# HOWL CHRONICLES

The Wolf Mountain Nature Center

March 2026

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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*

As I walked about the Center on my rounds this morning, I had to stop in my tracks and take in the beauty of the spruces and pines all laced with fresh snow that fell as I slept. It is the Center's 20<sup>th</sup> year and I recall the days spent planting those little trees, hoping that I may one day stand in their shadows.

Strolling past the animal habitats, I notice I am being watched closely by the four-legged critters that walk with me. I think about my dear wolf friends that I have had the honor to walk with over these years. It is difficult to not tear up thinking of them, their teachings, their personalities, their spirit, and their howls. Wolves I have known and wolves I have yet to meet. Such a gift, such an honor. I have felt the most joyous of moments with these brothers and sisters and I have also experienced gut wrenching loss. For only those who have walked with wolves through their entire life truly understand these very deep and

personal emotions.

So, as the snowpack begins to disappear around the Center revealing layers of ice (love my microspikes!) and melting into mud, my thoughts turn to Spring. Time to clean out the bluebird houses and wait for the birds' magical song to arrive. We have already seen robins and red-winged blackbirds which are both considered the first birds to return after winter!

Of course, Spring also means time to get started on new and renovation projects to improve the lives of the animals here at Wolf Mountain Nature Center. I have pondered and planned all winter and it is almost time to get to work. New raised platforms for the animals are on my project list, along with the planting of more trees. Our newest wolf habitat needs a water line and swimming area installed. The red fox exhibit will have a sitting and presentation area created; other

fox habitats will have new enrichment tunnels/walkways and upgraded water features. I cannot wait to get started! It has been a long winter but soon the entire Center will become an arboreum of trees and shrubs in bloom and full of new growth.

I hope many of you will visit and take it all in, forget about the world outside for a while, and maybe you will open up enough to feel the spirit of the wolf and perhaps hear their ancient howl to the spirit world. I look forward to seeing you and sharing my vision.

Walk in balance with Mother Earth...Aho

Will



## Director Dialog... Erin Lord-Astles



Last year, I converted some space in my walk-in basement into a plant room where I can start vegetable and flower seeds indoors in spring. I also can bring in all my potted plants each fall. It is a real pleasure each winter to be able to cook with fresh herbs I keep alive under a grow light in my plant room. Recently, as I was watering my herbs, I noticed two eyes staring back at me from the edge of the thyme plant; a gray tree frog had hitchhiked indoors this past October. It was late February by the time I discovered it, below freezing, with six to eight inches of snow on the ground. What was I to do with this uninvited houseguest?

Normally, gray tree frogs go into hibernation in late September through October in our region of central NYS. Gray tree frogs can tolerate temperatures as low as  $-20^{\circ}\text{F}$  by freezing 40% of their bodies. They can produce glycerol as a natural antifreeze, which allows their heartbeats and respiration to slow to a stop until spring thaw. Surely, it was too late for me to put my new friend outside, it would certainly freeze before finding appropriate shelter under a rock, log, or in deep leaf litter. I had two real options: leave the frog in the plant where I found it and hope it can remain in a state of low activity until spring or create a temporary habitat where the frog can remain for the next six to eight weeks.

Frogs coming indoors with house plants each fall is a very common occurrence and there is a wealth of information on the internet on how to properly care for frogs. Immediately, I knew this was a gray tree frog. I could tell it was a tree frog because it has circular toe disks that function like adhesive pads while climbing. Other species of frogs that dwell more in ponds or wet meadows lack these toe disks.

In our region of NYS, we only have two species of tree frogs: gray tree frogs and spring peepers.



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Gray tree frogs can range from green to gray to silver in color. They also have a light spot below the eye, dark splotches on the back, yellow groins, and rough textured skin. Spring peepers, in contrast, have smoother skin and a definitive X-shape on their backs.

So now I have a nice temporary tank for our friend the frog with coconut husk substrate, a dish for soaking, perches for climbing, and the thyme plant it occupied in case it wants to burrow again. It has taken over our dining room table, and I get to fuss over it and give it a misting several times a day. Now that it is in warmer temperatures of mid-60s in my home, the frog's activity level has increased, so I have been feeding it small crickets or meal worms every few days. I also have heard it clearing its throat and practicing its songs for the upcoming spring chorus.



I'm enjoying our houseguest, but I am definitely looking forward to releasing the frog outdoors this spring. Once temperatures are consistently back in the 40s and we get our first warm spring rain, it should be safe to put the frog back outdoors. If in doubt, I can wait to hear the spring choruses and release the gray tree frog as thousands of its relatives begin to call in the 6 acres of wetland that border our little farm.



Depending on weather conditions, we could hear our first frogs the spring peepers mid-March through April. We also could hear chorus frogs and wood frogs during those first few weeks of spring. Soon thereafter, we should start to hear the gray tree frogs, American toads, pickerel frogs, and leopard frogs from April through May. We should expect to hear pond dwelling green frogs and bull frogs April through May, with peak song in June and July. (Link to frog sound files here: [Calls of Frogs and Toads of the Northeast | Music of Nature](#), [Video of amphibian call phenology](#)).

Truthfully, the annual spring frog choruses are one of my favorite times of the year and really signal to me that spring has indeed sprung. Every year, I look forward to hearing each species. The more frogs I hear, the more I feel the habitat around our home is in good condition for amphibians, which are known to be indicator species of something amiss in an environment, such as pollutants. I hope you all listen to the frog choruses this March through summer and start to learn to identify each species by song.

In many cultures, frogs represent fertility, healing, transformations, cleansing, and good luck. I wish you all a very happy frog-filled spring!



# Spring Means Fox Kits!

**Peg Fuller, Head Fox Care Specialist**

Spring is a nice time of year. Lots of flowers start blooming, the grass turns green, trees get leaves, and wildlife have babies. In Chenango County, NY where The Wolf Mountain Nature Center is located, there are red foxes and gray foxes that are native to the area. Both species will have their kits in the spring, around April. The peak breeding period is in January and February, but can be as early as December and run as late as April. Gestation is approximately 52 days. Dens can be in old burrows, such as woodchuck holes, or hollowed out trees. Litter sizes can vary from 2 to 12 kits.



The red foxes are more common in the area. With the snow on the ground in February, people can see the tracks that foxes make. It is a single file type step. I know of a previously used den that has pre-litter activity by evidence of these tracks. Many people don't notice the activity prior to the kits being active. When the vixen (mother fox) gives birth, the father fox will still be around, possibly providing food for the mother. The kits will stay in the den for several weeks, approximately 6 weeks, before they start venturing out. They are still developing motor skills and exploring the outside world can be a bit overwhelming. Depending on the location of the den, the kit's exploration can become a problem. Casual observers may see them, resulting in lots of interested people wanting to take pictures of very cute babies and get very close to them. The more attention placed on the kits will result in a very nervous mother who may not want to leave the kits in a den that has drawn the attention of well-intended humans. She may decide to relocate the kits to her



'backup den'. This can be dangerous. Mother fox must move each fox to the new location one at a time and return for the next. Depending on the level of mobility the kits have, they can wander into dangerous territory, such as the road. In addition to being killed by vehicles, kits can also become prey to other wildlife, such as coyotes, hawks, eagles, and owls. Occasionally wildlife that wanders close to the road is mistaken by people as domestic animals. Fox kits resemble kittens and coyote pups resemble domestic dog puppies. It is illegal to remove wildlife. If you believe you have found a pup or kit that needs

assistance, contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. A list of rehabilitators can be found on the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation website ([dec.ny.gov/nature/wildlife-health/rehabilitators](http://dec.ny.gov/nature/wildlife-health/rehabilitators)).

Some people would prefer that foxes don't nest near their homes because people have chickens. Foxes get a lot of the blame for the death of farm chickens, but it isn't fair. In the wild there are raccoon, fishers, coyotes, minks, owls, hawks, and other animals that make a meal of farm chickens. So, the 'blame' can be shared. Yes, foxes will kill and eat farm chickens, but their preferred meal is much smaller with less fight. The foxes enjoy mice, moles, voles, rats and similar size rodents as their primary source of food. They will not pass up an opportunity to eat a larger meal if it presents itself, but they also are cautious enough to avoid 'potential prey' that can hurt them.

So, if you happen to see a litter of fox kits on your property what should you do? Understand that they will disperse once old enough. You probably didn't even know you had foxes until the kits stumbled out into the open. At about 9 months, the youngsters will leave to find their own way in the world and mother and father fox will settle back down on your property into their almost invisible existence. Should you protect your livestock? Absolutely, perhaps perimeter fences, roofing, and secure night accommodation will keep them safer from the variety of wildlife that shares your property. And then next spring, be ready with your camera with a zoom lens and get some wonderful pictures from a distance of the next generation of the super cute fox babies.

As a side note, Avalanche and Aurora are going to be 5 years old May/June 2026. They are a mated pair. As of now they have not had a litter. We are hopeful they will reproduce. So, watch out Facebook page, Instagram, or come visit to find out if they decided 2026 is the year! The red foxes, gray foxes, and arctic foxes at Wolf Mountain are always ready for visitors. They will prove to you that even though they are no longer babies they are very cute too.

# It's our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!

**Pam Mennis, Animal Care Specialist & Gift Shop Manager**



Hard to believe that Wolf Mountain Nature Center has been open to visitors for 20 years! So much has changed and grown as we evolved from those early beginnings. Of course, Will's vision began decades prior to opening in 2006 when he came home with Nakoa & Natani, the first two wolves to become our ambassadors for their species. When I joined the team fourteen years ago, the pack had grown to eight wolves, five coyotes, and two Arctic foxes housed within four and a half enclosures (Tala had her own special temporary space). Now, with over two dozen various animals to care for and fifteen spacious habitats needing maintaining, life can get hectic here on the hill.

While quality animal care will *always* be our number one priority, we also discuss ideas for implementing new, creative and engaging programs and activities to encourage visitors to learn about wildlife and the environment surrounding that wildlife with the ultimate goal of perhaps igniting something in people's hearts to cherish and take action to preserve our precious natural world. Of course, visiting the Center and chatting with our volunteer staff, taking a tour, reading bulletin board information, strolling our forested walking trails, or simply *being* in close proximity to the animals provides a connection many simply cannot find within the concrete confines of suburbia.

New for 2026:

- 🐾 A commemorative updated version of our original t-shirt design from our opening in 2006
- 🐾 Discounted "animal(s) of the month" sponsorships
- 🐾 ACT (Animal Care Team) Talks: watch and engage with Caretakers as they perform their animal care duties from within enclosures; this may involve feeding, cleaning, animal socialization, enrichment activities, & talks
- 🐾 Feed the Wolves: on alternating Sundays, visitors will be able to purchase a 5-gallon bucket of wolf food on site to assist with feeding of the wolves—some opportunities *may* involve entering a secure enclosure to "hide" food for the wolves to simulate "hunting" behaviors (once visitors are safely locked out)
- 🐾 A weekend long camp with the wolves: a longer, more involved & immersive camp experience than our single overnight program—details & registration on website



Building one of the 1<sup>st</sup> enclosures



Our original gift shop consisted of a folding table with photos & t-shirts!

Wolf pups Natani & Nakoa in 2006



One of our 1<sup>st</sup> guided tours!



## The Impact of Winter Severity on Wolf/Deer Predation Dynamics in the Greater Voyageurs Ecosystem, MN

by Alex Gross, Caretaker Assistant at Wolf Mountain Nature Center  
& Wolf Biologist at Voyageurs Wolf Project



Winter sure is an interesting time to study wolf predation in northern Minnesota. Once the snow begins to fall and the lakes, rivers, and ponds freeze, the wolves in the Greater Voyageurs Ecosystem are mostly limited to one type of prey during the winter, and that is white-tailed deer. This is in stark contrast to the ice-free parts of the year where deer (mostly fawns), beavers, berries, and other sources of food make up wolf diets.

While we know much of the food wolves acquire in the winter is by killing and scavenging deer, kill rates of wolves on deer (kill rates are defined as the number of prey killed per individual predator per unit time) vary from winter to winter. A natural follow up question to this pattern is why?

One of the two major causes is winter severity. There is actually a statistic that measures how severe a winter is based on the intensity and persistence of cold weather, the amount of snow, and the persistence of snow on the ground. This statistic is called the 'Accumulated Winter Season Severity Index', or AWSSI for short, or 'winter misery index' for those that strongly dislike winter. This index is updated frequently and can be seen at the link at the bottom of this article if

you are curious how severe of a winter you are having where you live. As things currently stand, northern Minnesota is having another mild winter, its third in the past three winters.



A kill made by wolves out on Pelican Lake. This was also a recent kill by the time I arrived at the scene. Wolves and other scavengers will most certainly come to clean this up

So how does this relate to kill rates of wolves on deer? Well, the Voyageurs Wolf Project happened to be studying wolf predation on deer during the winter 2023-2024 season, which was the mildest winter on record in northern Minnesota. The major takeaways (pulled from Gable et al. 2024), were that the two packs studied during this period killed deer at a rate of 0.18 deer/pack/day, or 0.037 deer/wolf/day. Wolves in our area generally need 2.3 kg of food/day to meet their basic caloric needs (Peterson & Ciucci 2003), and during the winter 2023-2024 season, they got on average 1.5-2.0 kg/day (including food from scavenging; this statistic is referred to as 'biomass acquisition rates'). The kill rates above are some of the lowest

winter kill rates of wolves on deer that have ever been documented, and wolves (specifically in our area) did not eat enough to meet their average daily caloric needs.

The winters since (which I have been in the Greater Voyageurs Ecosystem for) have also been relatively mild, but not e have not crunched numbers for last winter, and we are still in the midst of studying wolf predation on deer during the current winter, kill rates during these past two winters are most certainly higher than the winter 2023-2024 kill rates.

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As mentioned above, snowfall and temperature are big contributors to the winter severity index. Generally, deer are in their worst physical condition during winters because they are not acquiring as much food as in the summer due to snow. Further, most naturally occurring winter browse foods are poorly digested by deer. As such, deer use up their fat stores throughout the winter, making them more vulnerable to predation from wolves. Deep snow is also a contributing factor, and can create 'terrain traps,' which are areas where deer are far more vulnerable to getting killed by wolves. On the other hand, when winters are mild and there is not much snow, deer fare much better and wolves have a tougher time catching and killing them.

As such, how successful wolves are at catching and killing deer is more a byproduct of how severe the winter is. In totality, there is strong evidence that suggests winter is the primary driver of population change in deer. That being said, winter alone likely does not tell the whole story. Habitat is another very important driver of deer population change, but I will save that for another newsletter article and give you all something to look forward to until then. If you are

interested in learning more, the link to the research paper I pulled some statistics from is attached below, as well as a presentation from Dr. Tom Gable, the project lead of the Voyageurs Wolf Project. This presentation goes more in depth about much of the information mentioned above, and relates it to deer hunting, as well as wolf management.



Me holding the skull of a buck that was scavenged by wolves. It's hard to know how this buck died, but I found the skull in late January, and most bucks in our area lose their antlers before then, so this was certainly a scavenger



Presentation Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sonGNfk90kQ>

Research Paper Link:

[https://www.voyageurswolfproject.org/files/ugd/7cb5d7\\_f718de7bf7a74972b473c8253c178b2c.pdf](https://www.voyageurswolfproject.org/files/ugd/7cb5d7_f718de7bf7a74972b473c8253c178b2c.pdf)

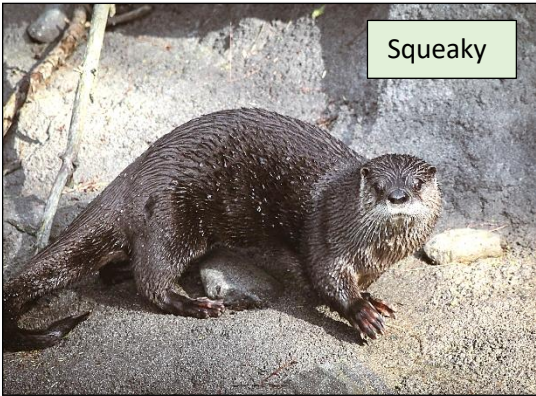
Winter Severity Index Link: <https://www.mrcc.purdue.edu/research/awssi>

Sources:

1. Gable, T. D., Homkes, A. T., & Bump, J. K. (2024). Wolf Predation on White-tailed Deer Before, During, and After a Historically Mild Winter in Northern Minnesota. *Ecology and Evolution*, 14(11), e70562.
2. Peterson, R. O., and P. Ciucci. 2003. "The Wolf as a Carnivore." In *Wolves: Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation*, edited by L. D. Mech and L. Boitani, 104–130. Illinois, USA: University of Chicago Press

# River Otters in New York State

**Niki Cesar Tracchia, Wildlife Advocate**



Today, River Otters are thriving in the rolling hills and mountains of Upstate NY; in the Adirondacks, Catskills, and Hudson Valley. Their population is also increasing in Central and Western NY.

But it wasn't always this way...the otter population in most of these areas were completely wiped out due to over trapping for the fur trade, severe water pollution, and habitat loss by the 19th century. In the 1990's there were incredibly successful reintroduction efforts, and today the River Otter thrives once again.

## Why do we need River Otters?

These carnivorous and clever weasels are critical ecological indicators and apex predators in aquatic ecosystems. Their presence means the region has clean and healthy waterways. River Otters keep an ecological balance by controlling prey populations by consuming sick individuals, and keeps the ecosystem strong. They are highly sensitive to pollution, pesticides, and habitat degradation, which was one of several reasons in their decline.

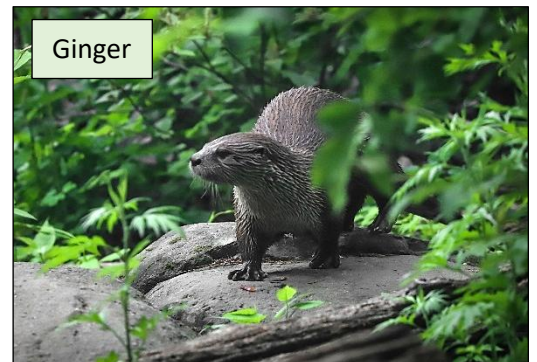
## River Otter lifespan, scenting, and reproduction

If River Otters in the wild survive their first two difficult years of life, their average lifespan can be 8 or 9 years. In some cases, they may live to be 10-15, though less common. In captivity they have been documented to live 20 years or more.

Otters use scent marking as a form of communication to other otters and wildlife. It explains who they are, their social status and territory ownership. Scent marking leaves their strong, musky scent that comes from specialized glands. They may mark by rubbing their face or body on logs, rocks and vegetation, or by urinating or defecating in areas they think are an important place for such a message to other animals.



Most River Otters will mature and can have babies of their own around 2-3 years of age...but some may not until 5-7 years of age. Considering many do not make it to adulthood, think about how easy it is to harm a healthy River Otter population! This is why it is so important to keep our waterways clean, write to our representatives, and do all we can to protect our wildlife. Speak for those who can't speak for themselves!



Squeaky & Ginger are two rescued, non-releasable River Otters currently residing as ambassadors at the Blue Hills Trailside Museum in Milton, Massachusetts where Niki volunteers her time

# Summer Internship Openings

Our full-time summer Intern positions are open to currently enrolled college students in related majors such as wildlife management, environmental conservation, etc. These positions offer an inclusive experience of what operating a licensed animal facility encompasses. This includes hands-on and classroom/field instruction to acquire skills in captive wildlife husbandry, observation and documentation of animal behaviors, habitat maintenance, public relations and education, and basic non-profit office management. For our internships there are large public speaking, public education, and physical labor components. Exceptional candidates may be presented the opportunity to assist with additional care and interactions with our various foxes.



Past individual projects our interns have worked on include: creating animal enrichment programs, monitoring trail cameras for “captures”, pond macroinvertebrate surveys, various species site surveys, monitoring interactions between wolves and ravens, and behavioral observations at different stages of pup development. When off-duty, past interns have been known to spend time enjoying the nature trails at the center or exploring nearby local parks and trails.

This summer’s program begins Wednesday, May 20 and concludes Sunday, August 9 for a total of 12 weeks, however past interns have begun sooner or stayed later in the season based on their desires. Our interview process is currently underway for the 2026 season.



**For a more detailed job description and application please visit our website’s Volunteer/Intern tab.**

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# Volunteer Openings



Looking for a rewarding way to give back to the community? Love wildlife? Consider joining our volunteer team! Volunteers are required to assist us a minimum of two six-hour shifts a month, although dedicated workers typically spend more. Tasks may include a combination of:

- 🐾 admissions/gift shop: welcome guests, collect admission fees, provide basic park information to guests, ring up sales, maintain organized inventory
- 🐾 construction/maintenance: assist with erection & maintenance of fencing & enclosures, build benches, picnic tables, animal shelters & platforms, maintain current structures
- 🐾 grounds keeping/landscaping: mow, weed, plant, haul brush and stone, spread wood chips and maintain trails
- 🐾 educational guides: greet and provide educational information to public, give tours, share information about the center, its animals, and the environment, create educational supplements such as power points, bulletin boards, & activities



**For an application, please visit our website’s Volunteer/Intern tab.  
theWolfMountainNatureCenter.org**

**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!**

As warmer temperatures arrive, we will soon be busy with 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](mailto: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 that for insurance reasons all participants must be at least 16 years old. Thanks in advance!

**Animal Care**  
 Metal "pooper-scoopers"  
 6' round/oval galvanized water troughs  
 Commercial grade garden hose (3/4" 500 ft)  
 Gift Cards: Tractor Supply, Country Max  
 Gift Cards: Chewy.com, Harbor Freight  
 Bags of cedar or pine chips  
 Straw for bedding

**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  
 Battery operated weed trimmer  
 Battery operated chain saw

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**Open Hours and Admission Rates**

\*Last admission on Sundays is at 3 pm.

	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)

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**Animal Birthday Celebrations**  
**Sunday, May 3, 2026: front wolf packs**  
**Sunday, May 17, 2026: back wolf packs**  
**Sunday, May 31, 2026: foxes & coyotes**  
 Join us as we celebrate the springtime birthdays of the critters by offering them special birthday themed enrichment treats and activities (cake, ice cream, presents)