INTERNATIONAL WOLF

A PUBLICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL WOLF CENTER
FALL 2011

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INTERNATIONAL
WOLF
THE QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL WOLF CENTER
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Ethiopian wolf (*canis simensis*) standing alert. Photo by Martin Harvey

Martin Harvey is an acclaimed South Africa-based photographer whose extensive photographic library includes wildlife, landscapes and people from more than 20 African countries.

His Web site is: www.wildimagesonline.com

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Graphics Coordinator
Carissa L. Winter

Consulting Editor
Fran Howard

Technical Editor
L. David Mech

Graphic Designer
Tricia Austin

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From the Executive Director

Social Media is Here to Stay—Ready or Not

I must admit I am part of the "boomer" generation, and it has taken me awhile to understand what "social media" is, much less learn how to use it. Whether I like it or not, social media sometimes seems to be the only way to communicate with my children. Today, the most well-known social media tools are Facebook, Myspace, and LinkedIn for social networking; Flickr and Snapfish for photo sharing; Wikipedia for knowledge-sharing and collaboration; and Blogger and WordPress for blogging. Experts say these tools allow their users to build relationships and solve problems.

Mary Ortiz

Our members and many non-members heard from us numerous times through social media in April and May. The Chase Community Giving Program offered $5 million to charities across the nation through a voting contest on Facebook. We were awarded $25,000 for third place in the first round of the top 100 and another $45,000 in the second round, where our "Big Idea" earned more than 12,000 votes from as far away as Germany and Switzerland!

We only learned of this contest a few weeks before the deadline and certainly had not anticipated this funding. What a grand difference $65,000 will make as we continue teaching the world about wolves! The promotion of this effort by staff, board, volunteers, members and friends was extraordinary in many ways. These educational funds came with the help of 12,000-plus Facebook users—and we thank each and every one of you.

We have learned that nonprofits like us must adapt to change and reconsider our traditional ideas about building relationships, solving problems and even fundraising.

In our case, social media helped people from around the globe band together in support of the Center and our ideas to improve wolf education. By using these new technologies, you can have significant impact on the issues facing wolves. We will use these same technologies to keep you up to date on the freshest, most vital information and issues involving the wolf world.

In our Chase contest "Big Idea" description, we made clear the hope that, in partnership, we can accomplish great things: "Wolves are a valued international resource. We teach humans so that wolves might live." ■

Mary Ortiz
Executive Director

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Endangered Species Act

A CONVERSATION WITH MIKE PHILLIPS

Clockwise from top: Lynn Rogers, Evelyn Mercer, Kevin Loader, Jackie Fallon

Editor's Note: **Tom Myrick, communications director for the International Wolf Center, recently recorded an in-depth interview with Executive Director of the Turner Endangered Species Fund Mike Phillips, an expert on the Endangered Species Act. During the interview, Myrick posed several key questions to more fully understand the intentionally ambiguous nature of this groundbreaking legislation, how it works, and what happens when it works. The following is a summary of that conversation with the full interview, including question-by-question sound bites, available at the new *International Wolf* YouTube channel www.youtube.com/user/IntlWolfMagazine.**

Photo courtesy of Mike Phillips

Mike Phillips, a leading expert on the Endangered Species Act, argues that the law's ultimate goal is to ensure that future landscapes are healthy enough that endangered species can eventually be delisted.

IWC: What constitutes success under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)?

PHILLIPS: There are at least three measures. First and perhaps most important, we prevent species from going extinct because once that happens, there's no putting Humpty Dumpty together again. The second success measure is for a species listed as "endangered" to be downlisted to "threatened," which means it's not in such dire straits. Finally, another important measure of success is delisting the species altogether, meaning federal protection under the ESA is no longer needed. The species is then managed by a state agency like other non-listed wildlife species. But given that some species' needs are so hard to meet and landscapes are so different from what they used to be, some species may never be delisted. But that's not a failure of the ESA or of the American people. It's recognition that sometimes we can't restore species to their native habitats or to areas within their historical range in a manner that sufficiently fits the spirit and intent of the ESA. Delisting is a really big deal. There have been very few cases where a species has been delisted because of conservation progress in the field. The mark established by the federal law is very high and difficult to meet.

IWC: Why do some people have a problem with that success?

PHILLIPS: Some people are frustrated by gray wolves because as they've become increasingly common in some areas, they have the potential to create problems. Gray wolves are a very, very challenging species. The gray wolf was subjected to a 350-year war by pioneering settlers. And that war lasted until the late 1950s. By the late 1950s, the gray wolf had been exterminated from the United States except for a small population in northern Minnesota and a small number of animals in Isle Royale National Park. The war against the wolf was based on the notion that gray

wolves are a problem because they take things I want. They take wild game if I'm a hunter, they take livestock if I'm a rancher and in the minds of some people they take security because they represent a threat to human safety. But there are lots of gray wolves living close to people. And you very rarely see gray wolves attacking people. In contrast, cougars, black bears and grizzly bears have all, on occasion, attacked people with far more regularity than gray wolves. We can't explain why gray wolves see people differently, but they do. Nonetheless, this war drove gray wolves close to extinction in the 48 states. The feelings of frustration haven't completely dissipated, and so some will argue that with delisting growing wolf populations, we're now seeing an unacceptable level of conflict. And because of that conflict, we have to respond by killing wolves.

IWC: Is it true that the ESA has the capacity to restore habitat, and why is that absolutely critical to both recovery and management?

PHILLIPS: The aim of the ESA is to preserve these species and the habitat upon which they depend. Without the particular habitat that a species depends upon, it simply won't make it. The classic example would be the black-footed ferret, a very narrow ecological specialist. At the other end of the spectrum are the ecological generalists, those species that can do well just about anywhere if some basic needs are met. And the greatest ecological generalist is the gray wolf. Historically, the gray wolf occurred everywhere; it occupied every habitat in the United States. The important ecological role that the gray wolf plays is that it typically subsists on things bigger than itself. The gray wolf is designed physically and emotionally, through its social ecology, to kill things bigger than itself such as white-tailed deer and bison, whereas the coyote is designed to kill things smaller than itself like rabbits and rodents. So with the wolf species, a great ecological generalist, we have to think about biological carry capacities, how many moose are available, for example. We also need to think about social carrying capacity, how many gray wolves will people support before they blow a gasket and say, "Gee whiz! We need a massive control program because there are simply too many gray wolves."

Evelyn Mercer

IWC: What is the future of the ESA? Can it be improved?

PHILLIPS: It's a landmark piece of legislation, viewed as such around the world. It's something this country takes a great deal of pride in. We like the notion of standing in firm support of our brothers and sisters that wear fur and feathers, that need our help and that require us to speak for them because they can't speak for themselves. And I think we take pride in the claim that no species will disappear on our watch. We take pride in the notion that we're going to hand to our children and grandchildren a country full of opportunities. And these species and the landscapes upon which they depend do represent opportunities. All of our human needs are met only if our landscapes are healthy enough to provide food, cover, water and space. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has done an outstanding job of improving the ESA over the years. Principally the USFWS has made the ESA better by integrating some common sense approaches to implementing the law. There are lots of provisions now that incentivize participation of private landowners, for example. And private land, which very much defines this country, is important for many of these species. I have lots of examples where private land works well to help save and recover listed species. In part, private land works well because over the years, the USFWS has improved the ESA to make it more user friendly for private landowners.

IWC: If you could change or improve the ESA, what would be the one thing that you would do?

PHILLIPS: I have thought a lot about the law. It's not enough just to look at the ESA and ask how it can be improved. You also have to look at what rules and regulations the USFWS has developed to fill in the gaps created by the broad language in the ESA. So when I look at improving the ESA, I consider both the language of the law and how we might modify the rules and regulations that guide the USFWS on a daily basis. The one thing I would do is make sure USFWS policy and regulations are clear on the point that concerns this notion of "significant portion of range." That is, the ESA defines an endangered species as "any species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range." As restoration ecologists, we have to wrestle with what constitutes "significant portion of range." An important part of effecting recovery is trying to understand what the original authors of the ESA meant. I think they purposely gave us some latitude to try to figure it out on a case-by-case, species-by-species basis.

We like the notion of standing in firm support of our brothers and sisters that wear fur and feathers, that need our help and that require us to speak for them because they can't speak for themselves.

IWC: Does "significant portion of range" give clear direction? Does it eliminate or stop the lawsuits?

PHILLIPS: No, I don't think so. We're a litigious society. We appreciate the opportunity to seek redress in court. Sometimes people are never satisfied. Sometimes people will use a specific issue to try to effect a bigger agenda. Sometimes an environmental organization might use gray wolves, and even

misrepresent the gray wolf situation, to advance some of their other causes. The gray wolf has appropriately been a poster animal for a host of environmental ills. Other people use the gray wolf as a whipping post no matter how few there are. For these people, the acceptable number of wolves is zero. They will argue that there should be an aspect of the ESA that says some species are no longer acceptable. There will always be zealots on both ends of the extremes. What's needed is the common sense middle that recognizes and listens to the extremes but is not motivated by them. In other words, "*You* want no wolves anywhere, and ***you***, on the other hand, want gray wolves everywhere," but somewhere between these two extremes is a happy medium the country can celebrate, take pride in—and move on.

IWC: What's the benefit of clarifying "significant portion of range?" What does that help us do better?

PHILLIPS: It certainly would give the courts clearer direction. If Congress were to amend the ESA so some of these terms were better defined, the executive branch, through the USFWS, could do a better job implementing the law in a manner consistent with congressional intent. I would try to improve the ESA by making clear that "significant portion of range" is recognized by everybody as a really big deal. This country didn't just say we want to prevent extinctions. I think what the country said through the ESA is that we want to embark on a journey that takes us to healthier landscapes going forward. We want these species to not just dodge extinction; we want them to be so common in the future that they can be delisted. That's the only conclusion I can reach from the ESA, and that is a really big deal. ■

Mike Phillips, an ESA expert and a member of the Montana House of Representatives (D. Bozeman), was the principal biologist in charge of the reintroduction of the red wolf in the southeastern United States and the gray wolf in Yellowstone.

I think what the country said through the ESA is that we want to embark on a journey that takes us to healthier landscapes going forward. We want these species to not just dodge extinction; we want them to be so common in the future that they can be delisted.

Wolves in Washington:

A Triumphant Return or the End of the Road?

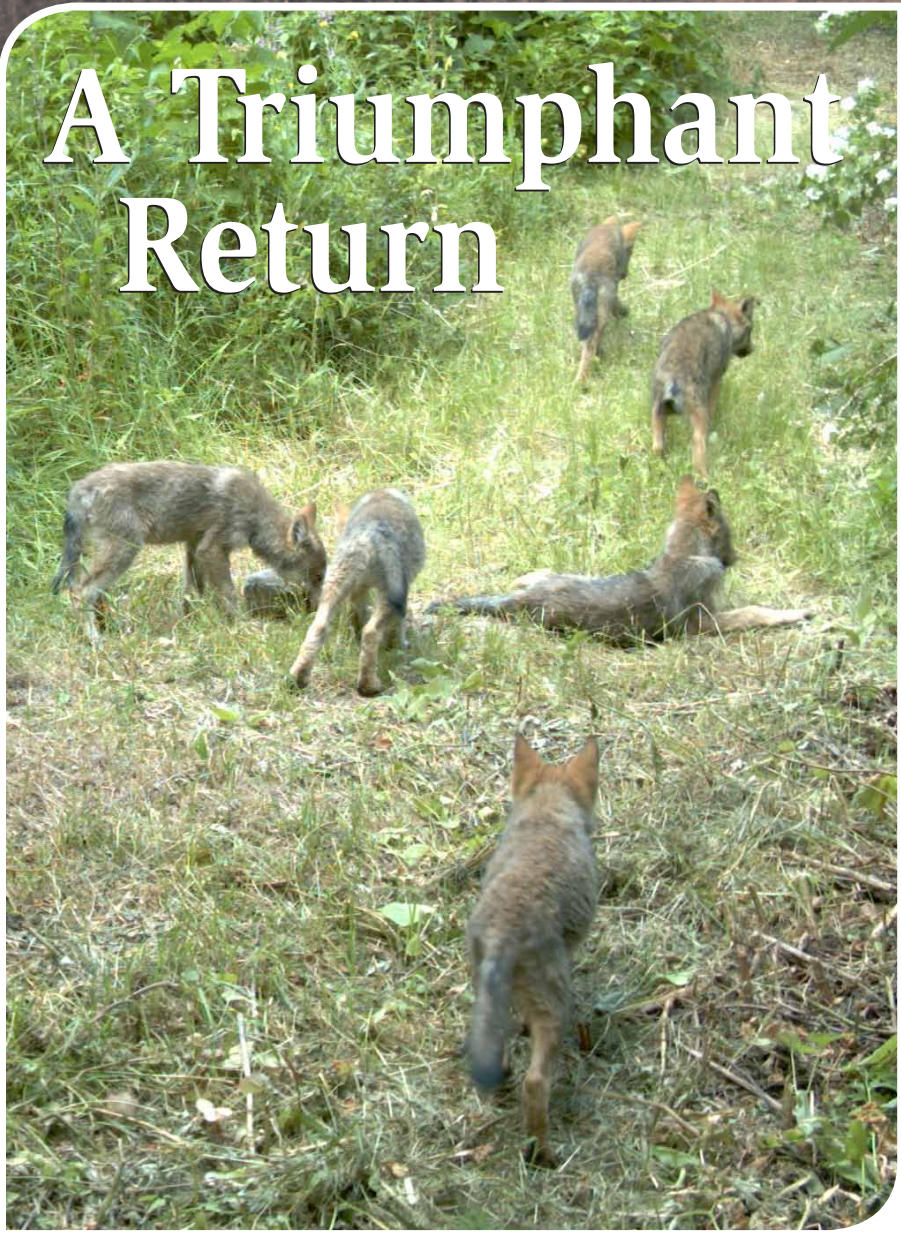

Photo courtesy of Conservation Northwest

This will be a pivotal year for wolves in Washington

by JASMINE MINBASHIAN

It was just before dawn when our truck pulled into the wildlife refuge parking lot. The sun had not yet risen above the eastern horizon, but the sky was slowly starting to brighten the Methow Valley after a night's rest. It was a cold, frosty morning in February on the eastern flanks of north-central Washington's Cascade Mountains. I was tagging along with a group of biologists to check some deer traps that were part of an innovative study to understand the effect of wolves and predation on ungulate populations. This area in particular was chosen because it was home to the newly established Lookout pack—one of only three confirmed wolf packs in Washington.

We were gathering our field gear together when we heard a large chorus of coyotes greeting the morning sun. The yips and squeals were unmistakable, and the coyotes undoubtedly sounded like they were having a good time. Once the cacophony subsided,

"For me, this sound was almost difficult to comprehend. I had heard wolves in Yellowstone National Park and northern Minnesota, but never in the Cascades—even after 15 years of working toward their recovery in my home state of Washington."

Young wolves from the Diamond pack in Pend Oreille County, Washington, are caught on a motion-triggered remote camera in 2009.

we went back to scurrying around the truck, gathering our gear. But less than a minute went by when a new sound instantly forced our whole group to freeze like statues of ice. It was the long, low howl of a large canine, coming from the opposite direction of the coyotes and from the direction we would be heading. We all exchanged wide-eyed glances and at the same time mouthed the word: Wolf!

For me, this sound was almost difficult to comprehend. I had heard wolves in Yellowstone National Park and northern Minnesota, but never in the Cascades—even after 15 years of working toward their recovery in my home state of Washington. After all these years of silence in the mountains, could this really be what I was hearing?

We quickly strapped on our packs and headed down the trail toward the sound of the howling. The low, mournful howl continued steadily, raising concerns that perhaps a wolf had been caught in one of our deer traps. After arriving at the study site, we were relieved to find no wolves in our traps. Scratching our heads, we were perplexed as to where the sound was coming from. Casually, one of our colleagues pointed to two figures on the hill above us that were watching from a safe distance. With binoculars we could see clearly that these figures were indeed wolves: a grand, older-looking animal, which resembled the breeding male of the Lookout pack that I had seen in remote camera photos, and a younger sleek animal accompanying him. They watched us for quite some time until letting out a big yawn; then they slowly walked away, as if to say, "You humans are boring."

The challenge for wolves in Washington

When first documented in 2008, the Lookout pack had six wolf pups, a subadult male, and an older breeding pair, female and male (see winter 2008 issue of *International Wolf*). This discovery was heralded as a triumphant return of a native mammal that was poisoned and persecuted to virtual extinction in the Cascade Mountains. Even more remarkable is that these animals returned completely on their own, with no help from us. DNA testing has linked the Lookout pack to wolves farther north in British Columbia.

Sadly, three years later, the story is not as uplifting. As of this writing, only two animals are believed to remain in this pack: the older breeding male and a younger animal of unknown gender—probably the two I saw on that February morning at the wildlife refuge. The breeding female has not been spotted since May 2010, and her radio collar has been silent. No signs of breeding or new pups have emerged this spring, and local biologists believe the future of this pack is all but lost. Worse yet,

the severe reduction of this pack is likely to be the result of illegal killing. Authorities believe that poachers have killed as many as five wolves from this pack. First, a bloody wolf hide was discovered in a FedEx box being shipped from Washington to Canada. Next, a skinned wolf carcass was discovered dumped near the remote North Cascades Highway. In June, three Washington residents were indicted by a federal grand jury on 12 counts of wildlife violations, including conspiracy, various counts of smuggling hides and poached animal parts in and out of the country and tragically the killing of up to five endangered wolves in the Lookout pack. With fewer than 20 wolves known to be in Washington, each of these deaths is a huge loss.

To address this major challenge to wolf recovery in Washington, Conservation Northwest recently partnered with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to establish a state reward fund to apprehend poachers who illegally kill Washington's endangered wildlife, including wolves and grizzly bears.

Despite this major setback, I try to maintain some optimism as new sighting reports continue to trickle in from other parts of the state. The success of these wolves will largely depend on whether humans are able to learn to coexist with these sometimes challenging and difficult animals. In particular, hunters will play an important role in determining this outcome. Many have expressed concerns as to what impact wolves will have on deer and elk populations. It's highly likely that the story in Washington will be somewhat similar to what has occurred in other areas where wolves have recovered such as Idaho, Montana and Minnesota. The deer and elk will still be here in good numbers and hunter success ratios will remain stable (as we have seen in Idaho), but the animals will be smarter, healthier and less brazen as a result of new predation pressures. This may make hunting more of a challenge, but it will also make for better hunters.

It's also important to remember that the return of wolves could be beneficial for areas currently plagued with an overabundance of deer and elk that are causing problems on highways, farms, orchards, gardens and ranches. In just two years, nearly $700,000 in damage claims involving deer and elk were filed in Washington and nearly half of those claims were awarded by WDFW.

Still, expect some hunters to overstate claims about wolves, similar to this comment that was submitted during last year's public comment period for Washington's Draft Wolf Conservation and Management Plan: "Keep the damn wolves out of our state! They are decimating the Montana elk and moose populations and from what I am told are doing the same thing to Idaho! We killed them off for a reason, we don't need them!"

However, not all hunters oppose wolves. In a 2008 survey commissioned by WDFW, hunters in Washington were asked if they support or

New Packs Confirmed

In July 2011, two new packs were confirmed in Washington: The Smackout pack in the Selkirks, not far from the Diamond and Salmo packs, and the Teanaway pack in the central Cascades, just 90 miles (144.84 kilometers) east of Seattle. DNA analysis of the Teanaway breeding female suggests that she is likely a recent descendant of the Cascades Lookout pack to the north. With the new wolf packs, the estimated number of wolves in Washington is 20 to 30.

"The success of these wolves will largely depend on whether humans are able to learn to coexist with these sometimes challenging and difficult animals."

A curious wolf from the Lookout pack is captured on a remote camera in 2008. Three local residents were recently indicted for killing several members of the Lookout pack.

oppose having the department manage wolves to be a self-sustaining population. Support exceeded opposition among every type of hunter except sheep, moose and goat hunters.

One of many comments made to the WDFW on the draft wolf management plan was this: "I am an avid elk hunter and a wolf advocate. I can go out elk hunting and find it interesting when I see wolves and elk. I respect all predators and feel there is much to be learned from them."

This is an important year for the future of wolves in Washington. This fall WDFW is finalizing its Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, which has been in the works for over three years. The agency will present a final draft of the plan to the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission, and the commission will vote to adopt the plan by the end of the year.

Earlier this year, a federal budget rider stripped Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections for Rocky Mountain wolf populations, which includes wolves in the eastern third of Washington, where the state's other two confirmed packs live: the Salmo and Diamond packs. These packs are now the responsibility of Washington state and are managed under state law. This makes having a viable state wolf conservation and management plan in place even more critical.

In the western two-thirds of the state, which includes the pioneer Lookout Pack, management responsibility still lies with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under the ESA, although the state is under contract for most of the fieldwork and monitoring. USFWS recently announced it is conducting a status review of wolves in the Pacific Northwest (which includes the western two-thirds of Washington), which will determine whether the wolf has recovered to the extent that it can be delisted or reclassified or if it remains endangered. This will provide an opportunity to highlight the threats to recovery from illegal killing and possibly establish wolves in the Cascade Mountains as a separate population worthy of its own listing status and recovery effort.

We are just beginning to see the return of wolves to Washington, and only time will tell whether Washington is a state where wolves come to die or if it's the beginning of a grand natural recovery throughout the Pacific Northwest. What's for certain is that this will be a pivotal year for wolves in our region. ■

Jasmine Minbashian directs the wolf program for Conservation Northwest, a wildlife conservation organization based in Washington state. She has been involved in wolf recovery efforts in the Pacific Northwest for over 15 years and serves on Washington's wolf advisory group. She is currently working with the BBC on a documentary about wolves returning to the Cascades, which will air early next year.

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How Does One Enrich the Behavior of a Pack of Two?

by Lori Schmidt, wolf curator, International Wolf Center

The question of how one enriches a wolf pack of two was recently posed through email and is extremely relevant to the management of the summer 2011 Exhibit Pack at the International Wolf Center. Those of you following the Center's ambassador wolves via the Web site (www.wolf.org) are aware of recent changes in the dynamics of the pack. The International Wolf Center faced a challenging winter with the loss of Maya, early retirement of Grizzer and the challenge of managing an exhibit with only two ambassador wolves, Aidan and Denali, born in April 2008.

One might ask why there is even a need to enrich a pack of two? The challenge is not with the wolves; Aidan and Denali are socially compatible and display very calm behavior. The issue relates to the perception of the dynamics that occur between the wolves and how these dynamics might influence the visitor experience. We have learned that packs with individual wolves testing each other can create active dominance and many opportunities for visitor observation. Calm behavior means limited conflicts, limited vocalization, limited guarding and limited threat displays. What's left is social interaction, but this does not mean less interaction. Based on our experience with the 1993 litter and its retirement, the exhibit may be different but not less valuable.

In a May 2000 article by L. David Mech entitled "Alpha Status, Dominance and Division of Labor in Wolf Packs," Mech writes: "The only consistent demonstration of rank in natural packs is the animals' postures during social interaction… In fact, submission itself may be as important as dominance in terms of promoting friendly relations or reducing social distance. A pair of socially compatible individuals will frequently demonstrate their social bonds through active and passive submission." Behaviors to identify include rolling on their backs, submissive pawing, wagging tails, face licking (similar to the food begging done as pups), inhibited muzzle biting and jaw sparring. In fact, as visitors observe these interactions, they may be more inclined to comprehend the social nature of wolves.

Thus to answer the question posed by our emailer: There is really no need to further enrich this pair of wolves' behavior, but to enhance the visitor experience, we will be conducting an enclosure enrichment program at 1 p.m. daily from June 15 through August 14. ■


International Wolf Center


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Visitors observe wolf behavior following the daily enrichment program.

Aidan and Denali inspect minnows added to control algae blooms in the exhibit pond.

Wolves of the World

Hiking the Roof of Africa in Search of Ethiopian Wolves

by Nancy Gibson

An Ethiopian wolf peers across the Afroalpine landscape.

Rebecca Jackrel

The ground seems to be moving at first glance. It is daybreak with a layer of frost disguising the waves of tunnels. Then small noses emerge, poised to find fresh grass that will be worth the risk of exposure. They are noses of grass rats, and dozens start appearing while raptors survey their chances for a meal. But over the ridge, comes a new threat: an Ethiopian wolf. I thought years of watching wolves would provide me an advantage that would allow me to discern these distinctively red-colored predators, yet I am surprised at this animal's camouflage. This experience will be unique.

I keep a wish list of places that stir my wanderlust. Favorite locations need to have unusual wildlife, be remote and invite a slice of adventure and a dose of culture. Ethiopia is a perfect fit. Often called "the roof of Africa," Ethiopia is also home to the world's most endangered canid: the Ethiopian wolf.

Is it a true wolf? Taxonomists and geneticists are currently engaged in further review of this question. Nevertheless, being able to observe any species on the brink of extinction is a challenge, not only to see the animal but also to participate in preventing its demise. Only a dismal number of Ethiopian wolves, 400 to 500, remain in six distinct remote areas separated by hundreds of miles and millions of people.

Ethiopia is a fragile democracy sandwiched between Somalia and Sudan. We have been warned to stay clear of the border countries as we are there to find wolves, not trouble. I say, "we" because my husband, Ron Sternal, couldn't pass on this adventure. However, protesters in Egypt have just ousted President Hosni Mubarak, and other Middle Eastern countries are beset with unrest. This adds a new dimension to traveling in this part of the world where using pepper spray as a deterrent will not be needed.

Hence our adventure begins in February 2011 in search of the canid of many names, most often called the Simien jackal, Ethiopian jackal, red jackal, Abyssinian wolf and the more common Ethiopian wolf. It is a distinctive species dressed in a brick-colored coat that is soft and short. Juveniles wear a lighter coat, and females turn a yellowish tone during breeding season in late summer and fall. The under parts of the throat, a band around the ventral part of the neck and the inside

Nancy Gibson

A cart weighed down by goods and passengers is led by a struggling donkey, a common mode of transportation.

Nancy Gibson

Our favorite campsite, Rafu, was surrounded by towering volcanic rocks that locals called "soldiers." Baboons were spotted at dawn in the rock crevasses, which likely attracted the leopards that called during the night.

Nancy Gibson

The rare mountain nyala spurred the designation for the habitat in Bale National Park and the Ethiopian wolves are one of the beneficiaries.

of the limbs are white in sharp contrast to its otherwise ruddy color. A silhouette would resemble a coyote with broad pointed ears and elongated muzzle. Males weigh approximately 35 pounds (15.9 kilograms) and females, 28 pounds (12.7 kilograms).

We have flown into Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa. With an altitude of 7,000 feet (2,133.6 meters), it literally takes our breath away, but it also starts to prepare us for the higher altitudes to come. The city is a mixture of some modern conveniences amid extreme poverty. Ever present on the roads are roaming goats, donkeys, cows and dogs. Fines are assessed if a car hits an animal, so weaving cars that stop and start suddenly are the norm. Ethiopians are proud their country was never colonized although Italy's attempt to colonize it left some remnants of the Italian language. Ethiopia also has two main religions, Islam and Christianity, and 88 tribal cultures. We also learned that coffee was discovered and cultivated in Ethiopia, and it is brewed to perfection every morning.

Tents, sleeping bags and pads are packed into our cars, and we hit the dusty trail. We feel a bit conspicuous in our cars while hapless donkeys drag

Rebecca Jackrel

Giant dark blue lobelias, which can grow up to 20 feet, dot the landscape along with other spectacular endemic plants.

carts overflowing with people and wares. We are headed on a seven-hour drive to Bale Mountains National Park in southeastern Ethiopia. The park, established in 1971, was designated to protect the rare mountain nyala, an antelope, which is called a kudu in the southern parts of Africa. That protection helped save habitat for the Ethiopian wolf, reedbucks, bushbucks, monkeys, hyenas, golden jackals, leopards, an array of birds and some of the most unusual plants I have ever seen. The nearly 400-square-mile (1,024-square-kilometer) park is the last chance for many of these species in Ethiopia.

The Afroalpine meadows make up most of Bale Mountains National Park. This habitat is quite unique with its open spaces formed by extensive lava flows that formed distinct basalt rock formations and two glacial periods that carved deep valleys, both modified by water and wind erosion. The result is a stunning landscape; its beauty and serenity are hard to match. Towering lobelia plants dot the landscape, and the many varieties of grasses feed the wildlife.

Our group is led by Professor Claudio Sillero, chair of the Canid Specialist Group designated by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, who has studied Ethiopian wolves for 20 years. He leads our group of wolf enthusiasts from around the world with varied interests in African wild dogs, Australian dingoes, hiking, nature and photography. Professor Sillero's decades of work in this region and his hardy colleagues guarantee sightings of wolves. They do not disappoint. Just as we are unpacking our lunch, we are called to the top of the ridge. With our hearts pounding from excitement and altitude, we gasp at our first sighting of an adult female wolf traversing the valley. I can see her orange ear tag identifying her as a four-year-old member of the Osole pack. She is most likely carrying a giant mole rat in her mouth, anxiously trying to escape our human presence.

The giant mole rats make up a large part of this wolf's diet. Both species are diurnal. The mole rats forage while the lone wolves look for underground homes conspicuously advertised with an opening on top. Wolves will pounce on the opening, press their ear to the ground, and dig and dig until they are rewarded with a 1.5-pound (0.68-kilogram) rodent. Since these smaller wolves eat smaller prey, most of the hunting is done by single wolves. There are 11 different species of endemic rodents, and their robust populations provide the basic food for many of the predators.

A giant mole rat is the favorite food of Ethiopian wolves and numerous raptors.

Rebecca Jackrel

Nancy Gibson

Nancy Gibson

A member of the Batu pack hears, digs and pursues prey, oblivious to her eager human photographers. The reward is a grass rat, one of Bale National Park's large rodents.

Rebecca Jackrel

A four-month old pup from the Tarura pack approaches a sub-adult wolf for a regurgitated meal, most likely a rodent.

Nancy Gibson

After a 4.5 mile (7.23-kilometer) hike across the Web Valley, we find the wolf den that was active a few months ago.

Our first hike is to a den site 4.5 miles (7.23 kilometers) away. The hillside is marked with trails leading to a series of holes that held the pups four months ago. The scat and bones are familiar signs from other wolf dens.

Since the adults tend to hunt alone and during daylight hours, most of our observations are of a single wolf or a pair of wolves. On the third day, our luck changes and we spot our first pack. The Taura pack is missing the breeding female, but the adult and subordinate male lead the four pups on a hunt. With no cover, the wolves notice us and quickly escape. We catch up to find the four tired pups lying in the open when the sub-adult returns with a prized mole rat for the pups. Wolf regurgitation is a global activity.

Rebecca Jackrel

Professor Claudio Sillero's horses are adorned with colorful bridles and more comfortable saddles than the author's.

It takes a village

"It Takes a Village" is the appropriate title of our next phase of travel. We are assigned small thin horses, bridled with a long rope that is looped between the mouth and chin with enough leftover rope for a whip. No thanks. Cooks, horsemen and camp help, resembling a small army, depart for our remote campsites. To Professor Sillero's credit, this local employment means the community will protect the local resources, which include the wolves. It is a 12-mile (19.3-kilometer) ride to camp, but the terrain requires lots of hiking, a welcome relief from the wooden saddles. Elevation is close to 12,000 feet (3,657.6 meters). The East Morebawa region consists of thick scrub plants, lava-filled streams and wide spaces. A hearty evening hike into the valley rewards us with three juvenile wolves.

We brave the freezing dawn temperatures to find the Fotoro pack before the wolves leave their sleeping spot. Noisy humans in our group, untrained in wildlife-watching etiquette, spoil our wolf viewing. It is our only gripe about this adventure.

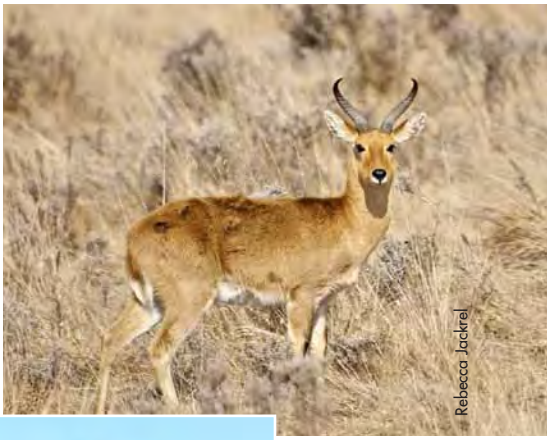
Next we climb up and across the Sanetti Plateau through unmatched beauty in every direction. Small klipspringer antelopes and hyrax (a pint-sized relative of the elephant) dot the hillsides. Our campsite is magnificent! It is surrounded by towering basalt formations the locals call "the soldiers." Caves and crevasses house baboons, and leopards call in the distance. A full moon tops off the evening. Can anyplace be more perfect?

We ride through a couple of wolf pack territories, and the wolves seem a bit more comfortable with us on horseback. We hear our first vocalization, which simulates a familiar high-pitched bark howl. After a week of camping, we return to the research hut and bid goodbye to our horses and some of the crew. The next day in the comfort of jeeps, we see wolves from four different packs, a real bonus. Our successful adventure is coming to a close, but we have been fortunate to site 30 wolves in 11 different packs, which equates to 10 percent of all of the wolves living in Bale Mountains National Park.

The fate of Ethiopian wolves is in the hands of humans. Canine distemper and rabies from roaming domestic dogs have taken a serious toll on the wolves. Encroaching humans and livestock competing for the native grasses that feed the wolf's prey could spell disaster. Lack of laws and enforcement add to the doom and gloom. Ecotourism that provides an alternative source of income may be the best solution for Ethiopian wolves. It is hard to imagine these wolves losing their last grip on Earth. It boils down to conservation and education once again.

To learn more, please visit: www.ethiopianwolf.org. ■

Nancy Gibson, author and naturalist, has served on the International Wolf Center's board of directors since 1987. She was instrumental in raising the necessary funds to build the Center, was one of the Center's first board chairs and has served on most of its committees. She also conducts educational programs for the Center.



Rebecca Jackrel

A Bohor reedbuck inhabits some of the lower elevations of Bale National Park.

Nancy Gibson

Ron Sternal is saddled up next to one of the distinctive volcanic rock formations.

Rebecca Jackrel

A somewhat leery wolf hunkers down in the grass hoping we don't notice.

Personal Encounter

Papa and the Crooked Lake Wolves

by Marja Olsen-Nelson

Editor's note: This article was reprinted with permission from the Boundary Waters Journal's *spring 1993 issue and involves a wolf encounter in Minnesota's Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.*

As we paddled down river from Basswood Falls past the pictographs, heading for Wednesday Bay of Crooked Lake, I tried to remember Papa. It had been a smooth trip so far, and that morning had been a good time to drift along and reflect. We did not know then how dramatically this quiet spell would be broken before the trip was over. Sitting stiffly in the back of the canoe, my mind was in a cold stupor because I could not see Papa's face, could not hear his voice, could place no moment in time with him. It was as if he had never existed.

Our canoe lagged behind the rest of the Outward Bound group, paddling under low gray clouds in a steady rain. My fellow instructor's mind was also a million miles away. We paddled in silence, letting the college kids in the brigade race ahead. In spite of the weather, they laughed and called to each other, taking detours to check out beaver lodges and osprey nests. I could not share their exuberance.

Papa had died early in the spring when most of the snow was melted but the ice was still on the lakes. He died before the ritual opening of the cabin up north without putting in the dock one more time. The fall leaves, still wet and matted from the snow, lay unraked; the shutters on the south side of the cabin hung stripped and ready to be painted; dead birch trees lined the driveway, waiting patiently to be felled for firewood. How he had loved that cabin.

I thought, why can't I remember what he looked like? What is wrong with me? I lived with Papa and Grandma every summer while growing up, knowing them almost as well as my own parents. All I could seem to remember was the vivid image of his folded hands in the coffin, so cold and dry.

The brigade stopped for lunch at noon at an old voyageur site called Table Rock and checked the maps under a hastily strung tarp. We would easily make our destination by early evening. The weather was beginning to clear, and the students were strong paddlers now after a week in the BWCAW (Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness). We were headed for a secluded lake south of Crooked where the brigade would undergo "solo," an experience where they would be totally alone for three days.

I was not worried about most of the students; they all seemed pretty brave about the solo idea. There were only two students who would require special attention, I thought. Dave, the football star, was acting just a little too macho to be for real, and Patti, the drama student and debutante from Virginia, looked frightened to the core. She had started the trip with 17 sets of clean underwear and had never spent a night outside the city before this trip; slim and petite, with a soft southern voice and a warm smile, she was everyone's favorite. One reason she had come on this Outward Bound course was to overcome her own fears and self doubt. Three days of solo in the wilderness would be a test of that resolve.

We set out again, paddling and portaging all afternoon. I still could not shake the feeling of loss and loneliness, the mental block of repressed memory, and grew morose and finally angry with myself. So I put it all aside when we arrived, threw myself into setting up camp, starting supper, and listening to someone's life story. This was to have been our last night together for a while and the group was full of nervous energy, trying to talk themselves through their fears, full of a thousand questions. We sat up late talking around a low crackling fire, listening to the loons call to each other. A great horned owl landed in a dead tree down

Michael Mees, meesphotography.com

by the lakeshore and settled in to watch for unwary mice scavenging for bread crumbs around the campsite. It was a full moon and colder than it had been

Becky Johnson

since the trip started. The tent and sleeping bags felt warm and cozy as everyone settled in for a last night together in base camp.

At daylight we got everyone a gourmet oatmeal breakfast and set out to find solo sites. It was one of those crisp mornings when mist formed in the bays, and it was so quiet that

We paddled in silence, letting the college kids in the brigade race ahead. In spite of the weather, they laughed and called to each other, taking detours to check out beaver lodges and osprey nests.

Gary Meyer

even the sound of a paddle hitting the thwart of a canoe sounded loud. Everyone instinctively talked in low tones, almost in whispers. We deliberately left Dave at the first rocky point closest to our campsite and gradually spaced out the rest of the group, eight in all. Patti we left until last so her side, too, would be close to the base camp. As we circled back, the students were all at least a quarter mile (0.4 kilometers) apart and could not see each other. Our parting words to each student were a reminder to stay at that location and not have a fire.

We headed back to camp and settled in for a long wait. There was always paper work for the instructors to do,

Becky Johnson

gear to clean and re-arrange, and books to read. It was a good feeling to be away from the students for a few hours, to relax and enjoy the sunshine, and to be alone with our own thoughts. In the afternoon we talked about each student at length, what they were getting out of the course, what they were contributing, and what they needed from us. The day passed quickly and we turned in about midnight.

I was no sooner asleep when suddenly I was pulled fully awake, sitting up with my heart pounding fiercely. The full throaty cry of a howling wolf rang in my ears! It seemed almost outside the tent. The sound stopped and then started again, this time with a different voice, and then another, and another. There were many of them and they were close!

At first I was terrified, but then gradually realized they were not right in camp. We were set up on one shore of a horseshoe shaped bay at the end of the lake. The far shore of the bay was only about a hundred yards (91.5 meters) away by water, but longer away by land. Getting brave, I stuck my head out of the tent door and saw wolves on that far shore. We decided it was safe to go outside and listen. We came out of the tent and watched wolves in the moonlight. The display seemed like it might go on for some time so we carried our sleeping bags down to the shoreline and settled in to watch.

We could see them quite clearly, moving about on a small rocky point of the shore directly across from our camp. The pups were running lazily, chasing each other. The others—sitting, standing, sniffing the air—would occasionally stop, point their muzzle at the moon and howl. At one point it would be a cacophony of sound filled with whines and yelps, and at other moments more of a harmonizing of sounds with one voice seeming to build on another.

Sherry Jokinen

One wolf stood out from the others, perhaps the breeding male. Larger and darker than the rest of the pack, he walked proudly and other wolves deferred to him. The first time I distinctly heard him howl alone, the hair on the back of my neck stood on end, and time seemed to stop. That sound was so primitive and free it epitomized for me everything I treasure in wilderness.

Then he howled again, and for some strange and wonderful reason, at that very instant I saw Papa's face as I always knew him. Each time the leader of the pack howled, my mind was filled with memories of Papa. The warm summer days when he taught me to swim, the quiet talks in the morning over his favorite blueberry pancakes, rummaging through his tool shed looking for a rake more my size, long walks in the woods. Papa was not gone, he was still there, I could remember him now, how he smiled, and shook when he laughed, and helped his granddaughter learn to appreciate nature. I thought, I love you Papa, I'll always cherish your memory, thanks for everything.

Goodbye. Goodbye. I looked once again to the far shore and they were gone. A cool wind made the moonlight shimmer on the water and there was silence in the night. It was time to go to bed. In the morning we would need to see what the students had made of this wilderness serenade.

The next day we set out early to make the rounds, paddling the shoreline to each solo site. Our procedure was to canoe by at a distance except when the students requested that we come in. Just as I suspected, Dave wanted to talk. The wolves had been very close to his site and on the same shore. He claimed he could still hear them moving about in the woods. He had not slept much that night and wondered if he would not be better off back in base camp for a while. With a little persuading, he agreed to stay put and we continued our rounds. The others were OK. The wolves had not sounded all that close, and the students seemed to like the idea of being there with them. I was still worried about Patti as we rounded the last point and approached her site. In fact, I was just a little relieved to see her standing on the shore and waving us in. We paddled up expecting her to be frightened.

What we found instead was a woman with her hands on her hips, a smile on her face, and joy in her voice. She laughed and almost cried with excitement. "Wasn't it wonderful," she said. "I have never felt so alive, so privileged. I'll remember this for the rest of my life."

Yes, I thought, and I will remember too. I will always remember Papa and the Crooked Lake wolves. ■

Marja Olsen-Nelson worked at Outward Bound for 10 years as a field instructor in the BWCAW and Big Bend National Park in Texas. Olsen-Nelson taught canoeing and kayaking programs for women with cancer, battered women, youth-at-risk, and college students. She is currently a speech communications instructor at Vermilion Community College. She lives in Ely with her husband, Jeff, and their two daughters Lily Beth (13) and Anna Mae (11), who often travel in the BWCAW with their grandfather.

A Look Beyond

Wolves, Wildlands and Technology

by Jerritt Johnston, director of education

Technology. It surrounds us. From Facebook to the iPhone to the GPS units mounted on our dashboards, many of us are nearly always plugged in. The speed of technological development and our immersion in it has had a tremendous impact on our lives.

That same rush forward in technology has affected wolf research and education. How do those of us with the responsibility of disseminating the newest and most accurate information balance the use of technology with the important need to physically connect individuals with wolves and wildlands?

While most researchers continue to use the well-developed and thoroughly understood methods of trapping and tracking wolves and their prey, advancements are taking place all the time. GPS collars are becoming more prevalent, thermal images are being used to study the effect of mange and advances in the study of genetics are fundamentally changing our understanding of wolf species.

Technology's ability to connect people with science-based information about wolves and wildlands is undeniable. The Center's Web site (www.wolf.org) averages over 50,000 unique visits per month. Having the ability to reach that number of people 25 years ago would have been unimaginable. The increase in social networking sites such as Facebook has increased the speed with which we can deliver information to people and our ability to directly interact with people around the globe. Our Web site and Facebook page continue to be places for like-minded people to connect, share information and ideas and help spread the word about wolf conservation worldwide.

Along with our Web presence, the Center is always looking to leverage new technologies to increase our reach and deepen the impact of our educational efforts. So far in 2011, we have connected with over 1,500 students with our live videoconferencing programs. We have also developed two new curriculum offerings with the software Moodle that will be free to the public beginning late this summer. These multi-media offerings allow students to work at their own speed and give teachers the information they need to assess student learning.

But technology can't do everything. It is essential that people have hands-on experience and a personal connection to the outdoors. A picture of wolf scat can never replace seeing it in the wild and investigating it firsthand. Without that connection to nature, people will never know the importance of habitat preservation and the necessity of wildlands to the wolf's survival. To that end, we continue to offer programming at our interpretive center in Ely as well as wolf viewing destinations in North America. Whether it's kids getting their hands (and much more) dirty on a bog walk or an adult hearing the howl of a wolf in the wild for the first time, we know these experiences will last a lifetime, and we hope the lessons learned will be remembered that long, too. ■

International Wolf Center

Tara Johnson, program specialist, uses a digital annotator to focus on wolf behavior as she conducts a video-conferencing session with a classroom of middle school students St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Robert Weselmann