



Tracking the Pack

Raising Wolves in a High-tech World

By Nancy Gibson

International Wolf Center Board Member Nancy Gibson shares her experiences raising the arctic pups that became the most recent additions to our Center in Ely this summer. At seven weeks old, the pups, named Malik and Shadow, joined our ambassador wolves, Lakota, Mackenzie, and Lucas at our Center in Ely this summer. Executive Director Walter Medwid said having the wolves at the Center “will bring the global issues and the international story of wolves to our visitors and members.” Arctic wolves are the least well known by the general public because their natural environment is so remote.

The call came on May 8: two male arctic wolf pups were born in captivity and doing well. Bottles, nipples, fresh goat milk, towels, and a special telephone line were quickly assembled. We were pioneering our wolf education efforts with live science via the Internet with the support of NBC-affiliate television station, KARE 11 in Minneapolis.

Raising wolves is a challenge in itself, but doing the task in front of a curious world via a web camera presents a forum for intense public input. The color of towels and choice of stuffed animals was always under scrutiny, while I worried about mustard-colored excretions being exposed to the world. I had to master the high technology of web camera paraphernalia, the most pleasing angle for exposure, but most impor-

tantly, the welfare of the pups. Brightly colored collars were attached to each pup for identification so the public could marvel at the pups' rapid growth. As each movement was being recorded in history, the pups were learning to adapt to a human's world that had not historically been user friendly.

The pups were taken from their mother at ten days of age to start the critical socialization process. Each day brought new revelations. At 12 days of age, their blue eyes were completely open, their vision limited to seeing shadows, bound to improve with each day. The pups cut their front upper teeth the same day, and by evening, their lower front teeth were

exposed. By 13 days, most of their tiny teeth were visible and they were sharp!

Equally sharp was the pups' sense of smell. I had to keep a certain distance from their cage—a mere whiff of me close to feeding time would send them into a feeding frenzy. This strong sense is a survival tool that would serve them well to find their prey and stick to their territory.

The pups made several sounds. My favorite was the cooing and rumblings some refer to as “comfort” noises. Those sounds of content-

ment were most prevalent after a good meal and were almost constant. As the fourth hour between feedings approached, the comfort noises changed to whines and short, high-pitched howls designed to bring mother back into the den. This became the time for the pups to seek out each other for comfort and play.

The pups' hearing developed earlier than I expected—at 15 days of age, they would tune in to the sound of the microwave announcing their next meal as I heated their bottles



Tim Hele

Right: International Wolf Center Communications Director Nancy Vest feeds one of the puppies.

of milk. Just the sound of the microwave door would send the pups to the cage door in anticipation.

At three weeks, their personalities developed drastically. One pup was more vocal as he explored his surroundings; the other one lagged behind by a few ounces in weight but made up for it in his feisty behavior. Time will turn their grey coats to cream

white and their “cuteness” will evolve into the sleekness of efficient predators. In the meantime, the adult wolves at the Center will demonstrate their nurturing skills with the pups under the gaze of the public and the high-tech world, reverting back to the natural behavior that has allowed this species to survive throughout the centuries. ■

See our next issue for details on how the pups, later named Malik and Shadow, (see page 15) were acclimated to our Center in Ely.



Too cute to be real! Gibson rocks one of the pups (at 25 days old) to sleep.

Amy Farrar

Snippets from the diary of a surrogate wolf mom (taken from the International Wolf Center's web page, www.wolf.org):

May 19, 2000 🐾 The two male Arctic wolf pups each weighed a pound at birth and have already almost tripled their weight. They are eating two ounces of special formula primarily made up of fresh goat's milk every four hours. The red-collared pup made his first attempt at howling at 11 days of age and he remains the most vocal of the two pups.

May 22, 2000 🐾 [The pups] collars had to be loosened one notch to accommodate their rapid growth. The diet has increased to 15 ounces of formula per day. Their eyes fully opened on May 20 at 12 days of age.

May 25, 2000 🐾 They have quadrupled their weight in 17 days, which is typical of wolves that need to grow rapidly in order to survive. Wolf pups need to be able to travel with the pack by fall.

May 30, 2000 🐾 Their light colored underfur is now noticeable around their head. Their fur will start to lighten all around their body the next two weeks until they are almost blonde. The red-collared pup joined his brother for a howl on May 28.

June 2, 2000 🐾 They are playing more with each other with play biting and growling, which begins the survival training process.

June 5, 2000 🐾 The two pups spent part of the morning outside discovering that insects are fun to chase and pounce. This is typical of what wild pups would be doing outside their den while the adults are hunting or sleeping near the den.

June 8, 2000 🐾 They gained 11 ounces in three days! With the onset of warm weather, the pups have begun to dig up the soft dirt outside to reach cooler soil to escape the heat. Wolves will dig large holes in warmer months not only for relief from heat but also the bugs.

June 12, 2000 🐾 The red collared wolf weighs 8.6 pounds and the blue one is 8.75 pounds. Their legs are beginning to grow, as are their feet and nose. Each day they are getting faster as they romp outside.