

# Wolves of the World

## NORTHEASTERN NORTH CAROLINA AND THE RED WOLF

### A Cautious Optimism

*"It is an ancient terrain, yet a land of beginnings."*

ROD HACKNEY, PRESIDENT, RED WOLF COALITION

He is now 11 years old, the only living free-ranging red wolf born in captivity. Once the alpha male of the Milltail pack in the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, this venerable patriarch was deposed two years ago when his mate, the alpha female, died. Yet he remains with the pack, tolerated by the other members, interacting with pups and serving as a surrogate grandfather.

The other estimated 95 wild red wolves in coastal North Carolina know nothing of life behind a chain-link enclosure, the first home of the old wolf. They were all born free in this land of peat bogs and marsh grasses, home to other endangered and threatened species like the bald eagle and the red-cockaded woodpecker. The red wolf Species Survival Program success story lends encouragement to restoration efforts for other critically endangered animals such as the Mexican wolf.

Although red wolf numbers continue to rise slowly, the future of this shy and tenacious predator is far from secure. First, few options exist in the Southeast for new release sites. Second, because of their limited numbers in the wild and the presence of coyotes within their range, the potential for hybridization with coyotes threatens the red wolf's genetic integrity. It was such genetic "swamping" that originally endangered the red wolf.

Red wolf recovery is, however, gaining momentum and popularity. Plans are underway by the Red Wolf Coalition to build an education center in the heart of wolf country.

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Artwork by Eva-Lena Rehnmark

The Coalition is also developing strategies to encourage its members and the public as well to get involved in land conservation and water quality control efforts. In addition, the North Carolina Zoo's innovative Web site ([www.nczooeredwolf.org](http://www.nczooeredwolf.org)) features an interactive program, *The Red Wolves of Alligator River*, that allows users to participate in the program to save red wolves and to learn about this beautiful "land of beginnings." School children can interact with biologists and veterinarians in the field and participate in on-line discussion groups.

Of intense interest now among researchers and managers is the question of whether the wolves of Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario and the red wolves of northeastern North Carolina are the same wolf. Canadian studies suggest remarkable similarity between the two, although some scientists disagree. If the Canadian studies hold up to peer review, are replicated and withstand challenge, restoration plans for the red wolf may need to be revised.

## THE SOUTHWEST AND THE MEXICAN WOLF

### Triumph and Trial for El Lobo

*"It is such a big landscape. There is a chance they will make it."*

RICK BASS ~ THE NEW WOLVES

Since March 1998, 34 Mexican wolves have been released into the wild in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest in eastern Arizona. One pack, the Hawk's Nest, continues to successfully hunt elk in the region. Some of the wolves, however, have been recaptured because they have killed cattle. In addition, two wolves have been killed by cars, and several have been shot.

Despite these setbacks, the Mexican wolf recovery program has achieved a number of important goals in captive breeding, education and outreach, and research. Substantial challenges remain, however. More captive breeding facilities are needed. In addition, managers are concerned that dispersing wolves may have difficulty finding other wolves to establish new packs. Also, there has been a tendency for some captive-raised wolves to approach domestic dogs and to show little fear of humans. Recent



Don Zippert

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livestock depredations have caused resentment among some local ranchers, and a wave of negative publicity about the recovery program has been in the national news spotlight.

Four wolves from the recaptured Mule pack were translocated in March to the Gila National Forest in New Mexico. The Mule Pack wolves will be the first to be released in New Mexico as part of the federal reintroduction program. Hopes are high among wolf managers for the success of this release, especially since the alpha female is expected to give birth to pups in early April. A second pack, known as the Pipestem, will be held in acclimation pens in this remote region until they are acclimated to the area.

The objective of the Mexican wolf recovery program is to re-establish 100 wild wolves over 7,000 square miles of public land

in the primary recovery zone by 2007. To promote tolerance and to build support for the wolves in the region, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is stepping up its efforts to hold informational meetings and question-and-answer sessions with local residents.

## THE NORTHERN ROCKIES AND YELLOWSTONE, CENTRAL IDAHO, NORTHWESTERN MONTANA

### After Five Years

*"The wolves are here to stay."*

MARK VAN PUTTEN  
PRESIDENT, NATIONAL  
WILDLIFE FEDERATION

Science-based wildlife management has been responsible for some major achievements in wildlife and habitat conservation. Among the greatest mile-

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*Wolf 9 was one of the original wolves brought to Yellowstone and was the founding female member of the Rose Creek pack. Here Wolf 9 (right) stands with her pup (Wolf 7).*

stones in species restoration and recovery is the return five years ago of the wolf to Yellowstone and central Idaho.

One of the original wolves brought from Canada to Yellowstone is wolf 9 who became the founding female of the Rose Creek pack. Wolf 9, called “the poster child of the Yellowstone wolf program” by National Park

Service wolf recovery leader Doug Smith, gave birth to eight pups just after her equally famous mate was illegally killed in the spring of 1995. In the years that followed, wolf 9 produced four more litters of pups fathered by a wolf designated as 8. Now silvery gray and ostracized from the Rose Creek pack by her daughter, wolf 9 was recently observed living alone on the fringes of the park. Although researchers acknowledge that such a fate is common in wolf society, park managers found it hard to view wolf 9’s remaining days with detachment. Then on Valentine’s Day, the famous wolf was discovered to have companions! Excitement has soared over the recently discovered pack, unofficially named the Valentine pack. The new family consists of wolf 9, another female thought to be one of 9’s daughters from the Rose Creek pack, and two black males.

Wolves are doing well in the park and on immediately adjacent public lands. National Park Service wolf recovery leader Doug Smith said he expects wolf numbers in and around the park to level off at about current numbers, although other biologists are not so sure. The 1999 year-end population numbers for Yellowstone were down from the estimated spring high of 160. Contributing to the decline was high pup mortality. In addition, a number of adults were missing, either from mortality or because of dispersal to areas outside the park.

The late 1999 estimates for central Idaho are also encouraging. Approximately 147 wolves comprising 10 packs are believed to inhabit central Idaho, and another 64 are estimated in northwestern Montana.

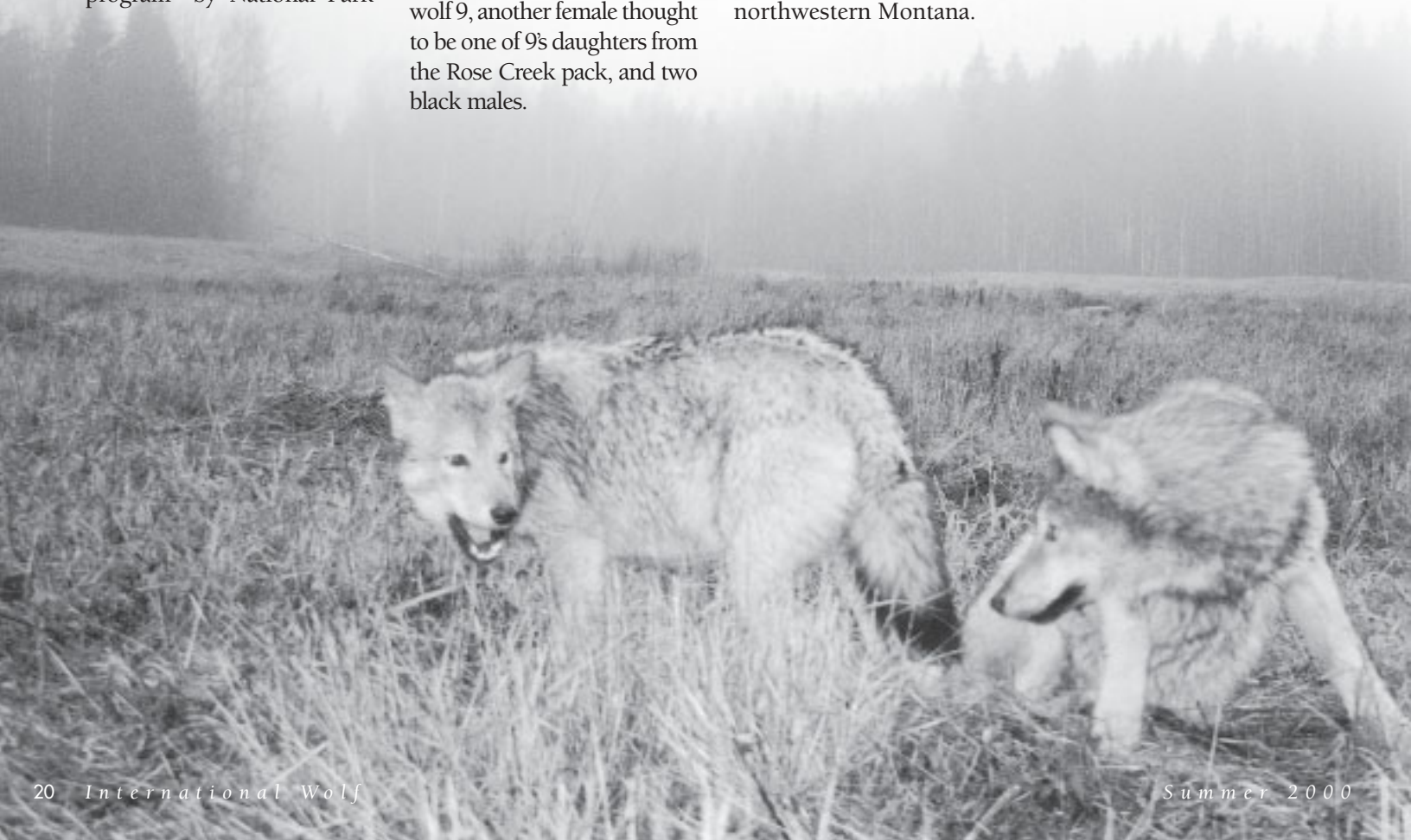
## RUSSIAN FEDERATION

### What Good Is a Wolf?

*“The wolf is viewed as an enemy.”*

NIKITA G. OVSYANIKOV ~  
WOLF SPECIALIST GROUP, IUCN

Nikita Ovsyanikov, eminent scientist and bear researcher, is one of the relatively few people in Russia who speaks for the wolf. Wolves in Russia are protected only in a few nature reserves; elsewhere throughout the country, they are routinely persecuted, and in some regions, bounties are paid. Federal law prohibits poisoning, but this practice is still carried out in some areas, especially in the Lake Bakal area and in the Russian Northwest



Federation. Although only a small percentage of the nearly 15,000 wolves killed in 1999 were poisoned, Ovsyanikov is seeking ways to have this practice stopped. Wolves in Russia are also killed for their pelts, a practice encouraged by a recent rise in the price of pelts.

The current wolf population in Russia is thought to have stabilized at a high level. An estimated 40,000 to 50,000 wolves survive in Russia, but their numbers vary from region to region. More wolves live in the northern latitudes and in the Arctic where the ungulate population is high and where there are few people.

In rural areas where wolves live near farmers, the wolf is viewed as vermin, and ancient myths of wolf predation on people are prevalent. Many farmers, living on the brink of survival, are not concerned about conservation, so economic incentives must accompany education about the reality and the possible benefits of large carnivores. ■

*To succeed, education about wolves in Russia, where wolves are only protected in a few nature preserves, must include consideration of economic realities.*

Vladimir Bobegov

Mike Fontaine