

# The Death of a

by RICK MCINTYRE  
and DOUGLAS SMITH

We found her near the park road, disoriented and bleeding, on the morning of May 8, 2000. She was known as wolf 40 and had been the undisputed alpha female of the Druid Peak Pack for the last four years. Blood seeped from numerous bites on her hide. One wound on the back of her neck was especially deep. The injuries, blood loss, and shock were too much for 40, and her life slipped away.

The necropsy report confirmed what we suspected: the bite marks had been made by other wolves. In life, 40 seemed indestructible. She was a fierce defender of her pack, her territory, and especially of her alpha status. During the years she dominated her pack, the Druid wolves had attacked and killed a number of neighboring wolves. Which wolves could have killed her?

To answer that question, we looked back at the history of 40 and her pack.

The founding members of the Druid Peak pack were caught in British Columbia in January of 1996 by the US Fish & Wildlife Service and sent south to Yellowstone National Park following the lengthy political process of wolf reintroduction. The previous year, wolves had been captured in Alberta. The Druid wolves were part of a second batch of reintroduced wolves to Yellowstone.

The original Druid wolves included 39, an adult female, and her three female pups: 40, 41, and 42. A big, unrelated male, 38, was added to the group. All five wolves were placed in the Rose Creek acclimation

*Wolf 42 howls. Wolf 42 was attacked by Wolf 40 the evening before 40's death. Researchers speculate that 42 finally fought back after repeatedly submitting to 40 during previous attacks and killed 40 with the aid of several other Druid Peak pack females. Wolf 42 then became the undisputed alpha female of the Druid Peak pack.*

Dave Bopp

# Queen : Yellowstone mutiny ends tyrannical rule over Druid Pack

pen in the Lamar Valley. The pack left the pen in April of 1996 and explored the surrounding country. The Lamar Valley is the winter range for thousands of elk and the Druid wolves quickly recognized the area as quality habitat.

In addition to the elk, the Druid wolves found something else in the valley. In early May of 1996, they ran into the denning Crystal Creek Pack—one of the three packs released in 1995. No one witnessed the encounter, but we do know the outcome: the Druid wolves killed the Crystal Creek alpha male and injured the alpha female. No pups survived. The remaining two Crystal wolves abandoned the northern part of their territory to the Druid Pack, shifted south, and used Pelican Valley as the core of their home range.

In mid-June, the Druid wolves traveled west and encountered the Rose Creek Pack, another one of the 1995 reintroduced packs. Wolf 38 led the charge at the rival wolves. But the other pack was larger, and wolf 8, the Rose Creek alpha male (the son of the deceased Crystal Creek alpha male) decisively defeated 38.

The Druid wolves fled the area after the fight. The next day, we received a mortality signal from a male Rose Creek yearling. He had made the mistake of chasing after the Druid Pack by himself. Once he was far enough away from his own pack, the Druid wolves must have turned around and killed him.

In early summer of 1996, 39 dispersed and wandered far and wide throughout the region. That left the alpha male 38 and three female

yearlings. Soon it became obvious which wolf had taken over the alpha female vacancy. Wolf 40 was making double scent marks with 38. Her two sisters (41 and 42) seemed to accept 40's promotion without incident.

In February of 1997, all three female yearlings came into estrus and were bred by 38. Wolf 41 and 42 gave birth to a combined total of five pups at a den surprisingly close to the road. Wolf 40 had no surviving pups that year.

Wolf 39 returned to the pack that

The Rose Creek Pack had three litters in separate locations that year. One of those dens was located on the border of the Druid territory. It had been dug by 19, a low ranking female in the pack. The other pack members did not seem to visit her or assist her with her four-pup litter.

Then we got a mortality signal from 19. When we found her, it was clear that 19 had been killed by other wolves. The Druid wolves were in that area around that time and were considered the prime suspects.

## The Players: Druid Peak Pack Members and Status

F = Female; M = Male

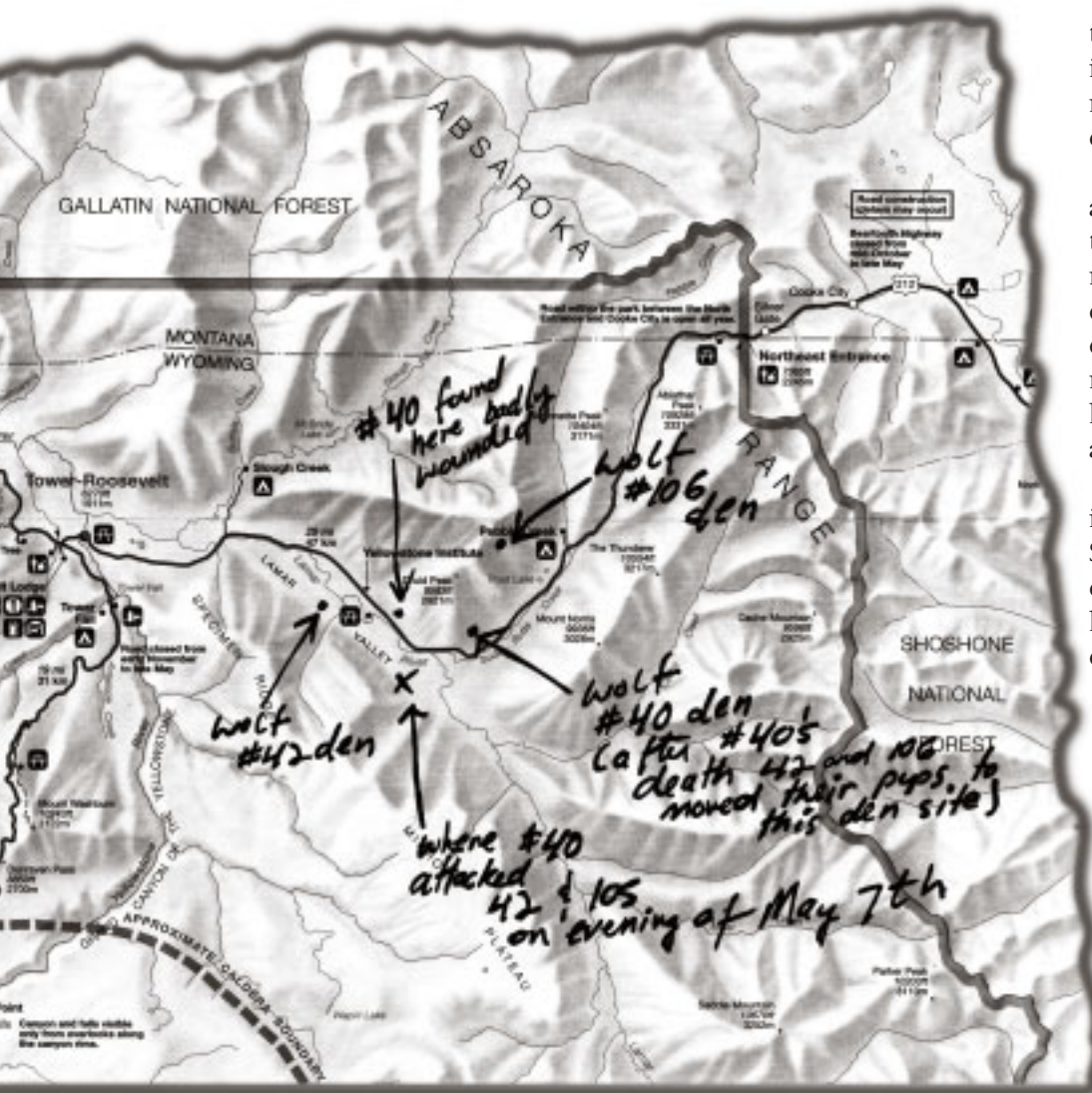
- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>21</b> M From neighboring Rose Creek pack; joined Druid pack in December 1997 after 38 M was shot.   | pack in spring 1997, and dispersed again in fall 1997.   | <b>42</b> F 1995 pup from Canada caught in 1996; daughter of 39 and sister to 40 and 41. |
| <b>38</b> M From Canada in 1996; alpha male, introduced to females 39, 40, 41 and 42 in holding pen; shot illegally outside Yellowstone in fall 1997. | <b>40</b> F 1995 pup from Canada caught in 1996; daughter of 39 and sister to 41 and 42.                       | <b>103</b> F Pup born in 1997 to 41 or 42.   |
| <b>39</b> F From Canada in 1996; original alpha female and mother of 40, 41, and 42; dispersed in summer 1996, rejoined                               | <b>41</b> F 1995 pup from Canada caught in 1996; daughter of 39 and sister to 40 and 42; eventually dispersed. | <b>105</b> F Pup born in 1997 to 41 or 42.   |
|   |  | <b>106</b> F Pup born in 1997 to 41 or 42.   |
- Note: Other members were present in the Druid Peak pack at various times but have not been included here to help clarify the main story.*

spring and served as the primary babysitter for the pups. She was much larger than 40, but deferred to her as the unchallenged alpha female. As the months went by, 39 became the omega female, the lowest ranking of the four females.



Douglas Smith

An aerial shot of the Druid Peak pack shows them resting in the snow covered Lamar Valley.



All four pups were found dead in the den from lack of food and water.

That fall, the Druid Pack spent most of their time at the Chalcedony Creek Rendezvous Site, an open meadow near the road offering a clear view of the wolves.

We began to see a high level of aggressiveness directed at 39 and 41 by 40. She would chase and attack both females whenever they approached the pack. Wolf 42 usually assisted 40 when she attacked those females. Eventually 39 and 41 left the pack. Wolf 41 later paired off with a young Rose Creek male and 39 was illegally shot outside the park.

In November of 1997, there were five females in the Druid Pack: two adults (40 and 42) and three pups: 103, 105, and 106.

Later in the fall, the pack temporarily left the park and 38 was illegally shot. The surviving wolves returned to the Lamar Valley, the core of their territory, and regrouped.

A few days later, a stranger appeared in the middle of Druid territory—it was 21, a male from the rival Rose Creek Pack. He sensed an opportunity and took full advantage of it. After 21 displayed a friendly manner, the Druid wolves accepted him into their pack as the new alpha male.

As the months went by, 40 became increasingly aggressive toward 42. She would attack her without any obvious provocation. Each time that happened, 42 would lie on her side or back and display a submissive

Arrows point to areas of the Lamar Valley in Yellowstone where the drama surrounding Wolf 40's death took place. Arrows and notes by Douglas Smith.

reaction to her sister. This seemed to placate 40 and she would end her attack. She never took the aggression to the same level that she had against 39 and 41.

In the spring of 1998, 40 denned at the same site used the previous year by her sisters and had two male pups. One pup was lost in July and the other one later died after dispersing.

In December of 1998, 40 and the other Druid females killed a two-year-old Rose Creek female in a border area used by both packs. This was the fourth wolf kill attributed to the Druid Pack.

Wolf 40 had a litter of six pups in spring of 1999 at the same den. Wolf 42 stayed away from 40's den and localized a few miles to the west, near Rose Creek, behaving as if she was denning there. One morning, several observers saw 40 lead the other pack members to 42's site. As soon as she sighted 42, she chased and then severely attacked her.

After the attack, 40 ran into a stand of conifers where 42 had localized. Wolf 40 then came out and led the pack back to her den. Wolf 42 later rejoined the pack and did not return to that forest. Did 42 have pups there? If so, did 40 kill them? We searched the area and found a den, but no remains of any pups. Wolf 42 may have been going through a false pregnancy that caused her to dig the den. In the end, we just did not know what took place there.

In early February of 2000, all five Druid females, 40, 42, 103, 105, and 106, came into estrus. We observed 21 breed 40, 42, and 106 and assumed he also mated with 103 and 105. When he mated with 42 and 106, 40 was nearby but did not intervene. However, in the days and weeks after 42 was bred, 40 repeatedly attacked her again for no apparent reason.

By late March, 42 was localized in a forested area south of Rose Creek, about four miles west of 40's den. Wolf 42's daughter (105) and niece (103) joined her there and all three stayed away from 40 and her den. The other female, 106, denned about three miles east of 40's den.

Wolf 21 primarily stayed with 40 at her den, but did make regular visits to 42's den and possibly to 106's den. Wolf 40 briefly visited 42's den site at least twice, without incident.

On May 1, we began to see pups at 42's den—at least five blacks and one gray. During that first week of May, behavior patterns indicated that 40 and 106 probably also had pups at their dens.

On the evening of May 7, 42 and 105 left their den and traveled east toward Chalcedony Creek on a hunt. Wolf 103 stayed behind at the den site, probably to watch over the pups.

At about the same time, 40 left her den, and with 21, also headed toward Chalcedony Creek. The two subgroups met and 40 immediately attacked 42, much more severely than usual. Wolf 42 rolled on her back and accepted the bites. When 40 was finished, she did the same to 105.

After that, all four wolves moved west toward 42's den. By that time, it was too dark for further observations.

We found 40 badly wounded the next morning. Prior to her death, we checked for signals from non-Druid wolves. There were no other radio-collared wolves in the area. That

meant the other Druid females were the likely cause of her death.

We think that 40 followed 42 back to her den and probably attacked her again or her pups. In the past, 42 had always submitted to her sister. This time, apparently something different happened. Our best guess is that 42 fought back. That would have been totally unexpected and likely gave 42 a momentary advantage. Possibly 103 and 105 helped attack 40—her wounds were certainly consistent with attacks from multiple wolves. Wolf 40 managed to escape the scene, but her wounds were too great.

After her death, 21 continued to tend the pups at 40's den. A few days later, he traveled to 42's den. She followed him back to 40's den, then,

*continued on page 26*



Douglas Smith

*Kerry Murphy examines Wolf 40 after her death. Murphy is a wildlife biologist at Yellowstone National Park.*

**The Brat Pack**  
 paper print  
 limited edition  
 of 750 signed  
 and numbered  
 14"x32"  
 \$85.00



**The Guardians**  
 gicleé print  
 on canvas  
 edition of 75-  
 only 7 left  
 20"x26"  
 \$225.00,  
 \$295.00 framed



## Images of wolves by C.J. Conner

**Misty Morning Trio**  
 Gicleé print  
 on canvas  
 edition of 75-  
 only 20 left  
 14"x 28"  
 \$225.00



**In the Shadows, summer**  
 Gicleé print on canvas, edition of 200  
 18"x24" \$225.00

**NEW RELEASE**

**In the Shadows, winter**  
 Gicleé print on canvas,  
 edition of 200  
 18"x24" \$225.00  
 On paper, signed and numbered  
 edition of 475  
 16" x 20" \$65.00



**Woodland Wolves**  
 signed print on paper 16"x20" \$55.00

## C.J. Conner Art Studio

9685 Easy Street • Hayward, WI 54843



(715) 634-8528



All prints available framed and matted 9"x12" \$25.00

## Death of a queen

*Continued from page 11*

one by one, carried all of her pups to that site. Wolf 106 also moved her pups to 40's den.

As far as we can tell, the four adult females are caring for 40's pups, along with the pups born to 42 and 106. We have seen a total of 21 pups at that den!

Not long after 40's death, we observed 21 and 42 perform double scent marks, strong evidence that 42 had moved up to the alpha female position. None of the other females disputed her promotion.

In the three months since 40 died, we have not seen any aggression by 42 toward the other females. Unlike her sister, 42 seems to rule with a gentle touch. The fact that all of the females are working together to raise the three litters of pups indicates that they are getting along very well.

During her reign as alpha female, 40 acted like a tyrant and was quite violent with the other females in the pack. Her life and death could be summarized with the old phrase that often applies to human tyrants: If you live by the sword, you may die by the sword. ■

*Rick McIntyre is a naturalist working as a field technician for the Yellowstone Gray Wolf Restoration Project, of which Dr. Douglas Smith is the leader. Dr. Smith's articles have been published in numerous journals, including 'Journal of Mammalogy.' McIntyre is the author of two books on wolves.*

