



Tracking the Pack

Wolf Days of Summer

by Lori Schmidt, Wolf Curator

Have you heard the expression “Dog Days of summer”? Those hot summer days best spent lying on the porch? At the International Wolf Center in Ely, we have experienced the same behavior in our ambassador pack of wolves. The summer of 2001 will be remembered for the unusually hot daytime temperatures. As the mercury reached 90+ degrees, summer

visitors to the center asked “How do the wolves handle the heat, especially for Shadow and Malik? (the Arctic subspecies).

There are three main traits that allow wolves, and most other canids, to remain cool through the summer heat. The first is the pattern of shedding. There are two types of hair on a wolf, guard hairs, those long hairs that dictate the color of the pelt and the undercoat, tightly matted hairs that keep animals warm and dry. Beginning in early June, wolves at the Center begin to shed their thick undercoat. By mid-July, usually just the guard hairs remain. This summer, Malik, Mackenzie and Lucas completely shed their undercoat while Shadow and Lakota maintained a thick ruff of undercoat around their neck, called a partial shed.

Depending on a wolf’s geographic location and individual characteristics, a complete or partial shed may occur. Arctic wolves may partially shed, while Mexican

wolves shed completely. After a complete shed, the insulating effect of the undercoat is gone, allowing the wolves to be cooler. In contrast, by only partially shedding, a wolf can stay warm even if summer turns cold such as is often the case in the Arctic.

The second trait that helps



Ellen and Brian Dietz

Lucas naps in a cool comfortable bed of dirt and leaves in order to stay cool on a hot summer day.



Lucas pants to keep cool. Panting allows the tongue to remain moist and helps heat to escape through evaporation, which cools the wolf.

humans do, wolves pant. When panting, the tongue remains moist and allows heat to escape through evaporation, thus cooling the wolf.

The wolf’s third trait that helps them remain cool is their tendency to remain inactive during the warmest part of the day, preferably in a freshly dug hole. This behavior best represents the classic “Wolf Days of Summer.” Thus on a typical summer day, the wolves at the Center will be sleeping in cool comfortable beds, attempting to keep their cool during the summer heat. ■

keep wolves cool is their ability to pant. Evidently it was more important for a wolf to keep warm in winter than cool in summer, since they have a thick coat with no sweat glands on their body; they only have sweat glands on their paws. So, instead of sweating like