

Wolves of the World

WOLVES OF CANADA

The Wolves of Algonquin Provincial Park

by Neil Hutt

Will we do nothing, just let it happen, lose the Algonquin wolf, just when we have discovered its uniqueness?

—John Theberge and Mary Theberge, *Wolf Country*

On an August evening, 1,600 people gather at a campground amphitheater in Ontario's Algonquin Provincial Park. After an information session, a long motorcade winds through the darkness to a designated spot, where the visitors park and climb carefully out of

their vehicles. No doors are slammed; everyone speaks softly. They have come to hear a sound that for centuries has inspired awe and fear, reverence and hatred—the howling of wolves.

Park interpreters have conducted these public howls since 1963, attracting hundreds of visitors each year to the 7,725-square-kilometer (about 3,000-square-mile) park located four hours north of Toronto.

Here the industrial urbanization of southern Ontario gives way to a natural landscape of waterways and forests. And here live wolves that have been the subject of long and intense research.

Called the Eastern Canadian wolf, or *Canis lupus lycaon* by some scientists, the Algonquin Park wolf has been the focus of recent genetic study and intense debate. Some work indicates that this wolf may be more closely related to the species *Canis rufus*, the red wolf, whose only range in the wild is now in northeastern North Carolina. Of grave concern in both populations is the potential for hybridization with coyotes.

Although the Algonquin wolves are protected within the boundaries of the park, wolves that stray outside the perimeter are regularly shot, snared or trapped. Each year, 35 to 40 park wolves die in this manner. There is no Endangered Species Act in Canada, and Ontario remains, in the opinion of many, the worst jurisdiction in North America for wolf protection. Outside the park, wolves may be hunted at

The wolves of Algonquin Provincial Park are Eastern Canadian wolves, or *Canis lupus lycaon*.

Mary Theberge



Mary Theberge



any time of the year by landholders or holders of a small-game license. No bag limits or quotas are imposed, and there are no requirements for reporting the “taking” of wolves. An estimated 150 to 170 wolves live in the park, but research indicates the population is not self-sustaining; that is, mortality rates are higher than birth rates.

In response to reports that the Algonquin wolf population has declined by half since the mid-1960s, Minister of Natural Resources John Snobelen

recently established a year-round moratorium on the killing of wolves in 39 townships immediately surrounding Algonquin Park. Field researchers estimate that half of the 34 to 38 wolf packs within the park have ranges extending beyond park boundaries. Thus, Snobelen’s decision was greeted with enthusiasm by wolf supporters. However, because the moratorium is

The year-round moratorium on wolf killing exceeded the seasonal closures on hunting and snaring recommended by the Minister of Natural Resources Wolf Advisory Committee, which scientists and environmentalists view as a conservation success. For the full text of the committee’s recommendations, see the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Web site at www.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/csb/news/nov6fs201.html.

set to expire in 30 months, pressure is mounting among environmental groups to make the minister's decision permanent.

Dr. John Theberge and his wife, Mary, authors of the book *Wolf Country*, have spent years researching the Algonquin wolf—its prey base (deer, beaver and moose), the high mortality rate and the environmental factors influencing its long-term survival. The Theberges pointed out that for the Algonquin wolves to be protected, they need an adequate core. In John Theberge's opinion, 30 months are not sufficient. "It is not long enough for a significant population recovery; ultimately a permanent ban must be implemented," Theberge said. "As well, if wolves are ever again subject to excessive killing, humans, not nature, will shape behavior and other characteristics of the future wolf population, and that constitutes a failure in park management."

The author thanks Dr. John Theberge for his help in preparing this article.

Testing Tolerance

Wolf Y-206 and the Legacy of Yellowstone

by Neil Hutt

She has a rap sheet and a reputation as a livestock killer. Her mate is dead, and as the winter of 2002 turns slowly to spring in the Northern Rockies, Wolf Y-206, the breeding female of Montana's Gravelly pack, is alone. The breeding male was shot legally by federal wildlife officials in spring 2001 after the pack killed 35 sheep near Ennis, Montana. Y-206, along with her six pups and a yearling

male, was captured in June 2001 and held at Ted Turner's Flying D Ranch south of Bozeman, Montana.

Six months later, in December 2001, the wolves—all radio-collared—were translocated to the remote Yaak Valley in extreme northwestern Montana, where, it was hoped, they would not resurrect their

troubled past. As of late February 2002, five of the pups are still in the area where they were released. The sixth pup is 25 miles north, in Canada, and the yearling male, now nearly 2 years old, has disappeared into Idaho.

Y-206 didn't stick around long, either. She headed west, presumably on a quest for a new mate. Her journey has taken her across the state line and 80 miles into an isolated region in Washington with few sheep and cattle and no other wolf packs. The distance she has traveled is not remarkable; during much of the year, wolves are constantly on the move. Y-206's presence in Washington, however, is newsworthy; the last confirmed wolf sighting in the state was in 1991 (see *International Wolf*, Winter 1992).



William Ridgway, Kishenehn Wildlife Works

For more information, see:



Wolf Country: Eleven Years Tracking the Algonquin Wolves by John Theberge with Mary Theberge, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1998.



Algonquin Wolf Advisory Group Recommendations Fact Sheet, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, www.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/csb/news/nov0fs201.html.



In late February 2002, Wolf Y-206 left Washington State and crossed into British Columbia. Biologists located her near a highway about 20 miles north of the U.S. border. The juvenile male who had moved into Idaho shortly after his release in Montana's Yaak Valley has also moved into Canada.

The presence of Y-206 also provokes thought and discussion as wolves increase and expand their range in the Northern Rockies. Wolves have always held symbolic roles. Humans have demonized them as “beasts of waste and desolation,” symbols of evil. Conversely, wolves have been revered as paragons of strength, endurance and skill. “I am a hunter’s hunter,” the red wolf says in Cherokee mythology.

Wolves are also symbols of untamed places, of wilderness. Y-206’s parents were brought from Canada to Yellowstone in the mid-1990s. They were symbolic of a new attitude toward summit predators in general and wolves in particular. To an increasingly enlightened public, wolves were no longer viewed as vermin to be ruthlessly exterminated but as engineers of biodiversity, necessary to the ecological health of the regions they occupy.

Y-206’s parents were part of the Northern Rockies wolf recovery effort, one of the 20th century’s greatest

conservation achievements. But Y-206, a daughter of the reintroduction success, is an example of the need to improve public understanding of the problems wolves can cause for people who live near them and of the need to develop strategies for managing wolf populations.

While many wolf advocates applaud the decision to allow Y-206 to wander freely in Washington, others are less enthusiastic. Wolf haters have long distorted the truth about wolves, but wolf advocates have also created myths that do not reflect the real wolf. Y-206 represents the need to distinguish between wolf persecution and responsible wolf management.

Meanwhile, as of late February 2002, Y-206 is still in Washington, where her movements are closely monitored by U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologists. If she remains in the state, she will enjoy full protection under the Endangered Species Act. Wildlife officials predict, however, that her travels will also take her to Montana or Idaho. In preparation for the wolf’s removal from the Endangered Species list, both states are attempting to construct management plans consistent with maintaining viable populations of wolves and their prey while at the same time addressing the challenges faced by people directly affected by wolves.

Wolf Reclassification in the United States: An Update

by Nina Fascione

If the past 30 years of wolf conservation efforts in the United States have taught us one thing, it is that nothing is simple when it comes to this species. The current tortuous process is the federal reclassification of wolves under the Endangered Species Act. Despite the release of a proposed reclassification plan more than a year and a half ago, the final rule has yet to be released. The volume and complexity of the document, its political ramifications, the change in administrations and several vacant positions at the Department of the Interior, including Fish and Wildlife director, have all contributed to the delay.

The wolf reclassification rule is presently under review in the Department of the Interior, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates the rule will be released late this spring, most likely to mixed reviews. The final rule will address gray wolf recovery throughout the

lower 48 states. It is expected to be significantly changed from the proposed rule, released in July 2000 (see "Understanding the Reclassification Controversy," *International Wolf*, Summer 2001). For example, there will likely be no distinct population segment (DPS) status for the northeastern states, as was proposed in the earlier document, reducing the number of DPSs in the United States from four to three. In the West, the boundaries for the Northern Rockies recovery

area will probably be expanded to include most of the western states, with no change in the recovery goals. The southwest recovery area for Mexican wolves may be expanded.

Some aspects of the plan will remain the same as in the proposal. In the Great Lakes states, wolves are expected to be reclassified to threatened in Wisconsin and Michigan, where they are currently listed as endangered. The service has indicated that it will initiate delisting of the Great Lakes wolf population soon after the reclassification rule is finalized.

Wolf advocates are objecting to aspects of the final rule even before it is released. There had been

tremendous support for a northeastern DPS among both the scientific community and the general public, calls by conservationists for additional wolf recovery areas, particularly in the Southern Rockies and Pacific Northwest, and expectations that an expanded recovery area in the Northern Rockies would lead to increased recovery goals. None of these is expected to be in the final rule. Likewise, wolf opponents will find some aspects of the rule unappealing. Livestock interests want to see federal protections for wolves completely removed, rather than lessened, in Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin, as well

continued on next page



Lynn and Donna Rogers

