

Tracking the Pack

The Golden Years

by Lori Schmidt, Wolf Curator,
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Those of you following the International Wolf Center's ambassador pack via the Web site (www.wolf.org) are aware of the recent changes in the dynamics of the pack. For those of you who wait for the magazine to get your news, well, here's the scoop.

Since the year 2000, the ambassador pack has undergone some changes. The arctic pups we acquired were born that year and matured into strong, healthy adults while the 1993 litter of MacKenzie, Lucas and

Lakota began to show signs of age. During August 2002, it was apparent that the younger pack mates were frequently testing Lakota and MacKenzie. Rather than risk a life-threatening injury, the Center's wolf management team decided to retire them to a separate enclosure.

The dynamics of the ambassador pack are similar to what goes on in the wild. Wolves in the wild rarely live past 8 or 9 years of age, and thus the older members (born in 1993) of our ambassador pack are at the age when wolves naturally begin to slow down. As the arctic wolves matured, they did what any young wolf might do: they looked for weakness in their pack members and tested them.

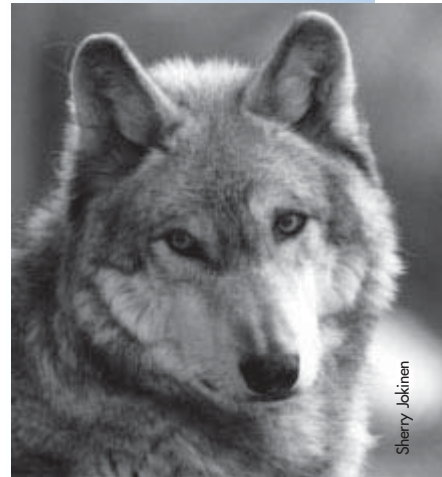
The survival of wolves depends on the strength of the pack. Testing is a behavior that has developed over generation after generation of natural selection.

But whereas older animals in the wild may go off on their own and spend their last months in a struggle to survive, managers of captive wolves can retire animals to a comfortable enclosure. Although the pack members' behavior determined that Lakota and MacKenzie should be removed, their aging physical condition would have eventually led to this decision.

These wolves have served the Center well as educational ambassadors, and we value what they have done for us. Now it is time for the Center to return the favor in their golden years. We want their final years to be more comfortable, without the stress of maintaining rank order with younger wolves. Older wolves also need more medical care than younger pack members, which can best be provided in a smaller enclosure. A special thanks goes to all who made the retirement enclosure possible, especially John and Donna Virr. A complete list of donors can be found on page 16 of this issue. ■

Lucas Also Removed from the Ambassador Pack

On November 9, 2002, the Center staff noticed that the arctic wolves, Malik and Shadow, were harassing Lucas, the last of the older wolves left on display.



Sherry Jokinen

Two shallow puncture wounds were observed on Lucas's hindquarters. Also, Lucas had been showing his age in his limited ability to climb rocks in the enclosure. Considering Lucas's vulnerability if he were to remain in the pack, the Center's veterinarian, Dr. Chip Hanson, and Lori Schmidt, Wolf Curator, decided to move him into the retirement enclosure. The transition went smoothly. At first Lucas showed anxiety and was aggressive toward MacKenzie but then settled down and ate a beaver carcass. Lucas was later observed sleeping close to Lakota. So far, life in retirement is good for all.



Photos: International Wolf Center

MacKenzie (at left in top photo and foreground above) and Lakota in the retirement enclosure