



# FROM FOURTEEN

by  
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*Just a few individuals made up the founding population of red wolves—the parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents of all red wolves known to exist today.*

**H**ave you ever heard of Mr. and Mrs. Sabine from Jefferson County, Texas? How about Ms. Wessie, also from Texas? Or John from Calcasieu Parish in Louisiana? Maybe you would recognize them by their Studbook Numbers—6, 12, 13, and 26. Whether known by name or number, they are red wolves. But not just any red wolves. These are the names of a few individuals that made up the founding population of red wolves—the parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents of all red wolves known to exist today.

After the bleak future of the red wolf was revealed, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided to make every effort to save the species. This consisted of capturing as many red wolves from the wild as possible and placing them in a captive breeding program with the hope of one day releasing the species back into the wild. This daunting task began in the early 1970s. More than 400 canids (*Canis* is the genus that includes wolves, coyotes and dogs) were trapped and evaluated. Only a small fraction of the animals caught met

the standards developed to define the red wolf. These standards included minimal morphological measurements such as shoulder height, total length, hind foot length and skull features that distinguish the red wolf from coyotes, feral dogs and wolf-coyote hybrids. From the more than 400 canids trapped, just 43 animals met the minimal standards. Those animals were placed in a breeding program at the Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium in Tacoma, Washington. Their final identification as red wolves would be based on the resulting offspring from breeding studies. So began the captive breeding program.

By 1980, the red wolf was declared extinct in the wild. The fate of the species now depended on the successful reproduction of those individuals that met the minimal standards. Some, like Buddy, Margie, Judy and John, were known only by first name. Others were given fictitious surnames, like Ms. Wessie, Mrs. McBride and Mr. and Mrs. Sabine. A few had descriptive names, such as Happy Face and Gulf Oil Split Lip, and others were simply named after the place they were trapped, like Fortenberry Female and Pines Inholding Male, Crain Female and Sabine Ranch Male. By any name, these animals represented the last

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# BEGINNING

hope for the survival of the red wolf.

Unfortunately, most animals in the breeding program produced offspring that left their status as pure red wolves improbable. At least four animals never reproduced, so their verification as red wolves could not be made. Margie, Judy, Buddy and nameless others were removed from the captive breeding program. The future of the red wolf now relied on just 14 animals that reproduced and were verified as pure red wolves.

Over the years the breeding program has had its share of ups and downs. Two wolves—Crain Female and Pines Inholding Male—are no longer represented with living descendants in the current population. This has reduced the genetic diversity in the existing population of red wolves to only 12 founding animals. But applications in reproductive technology, intensive management, persistence and a little luck have assisted in the conservation of the red wolf. And in 1987 the red wolf was reintroduced into the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, North Carolina. Once again the red wolf was free in the wild.

Today, due in part to an aggressive Adaptive Management Program to prevent hybridization with coyotes, the red wolf is reproducing and surviving. More than 150 wolves live in captive breeding facilities

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Today, the red wolf is reproducing and surviving in the wild.

throughout the United States, and more than 100 wolves, living in 20 packs or pairs, inhabit the countryside of northeastern North Carolina. This was all made possible by the tireless efforts of many dedicated professionals and the last 14 red wolves known to exist.

The next time you see a red wolf in a zoo or hear a red wolf howl, or if you're lucky enough to see a wolf in the wild, think about John and Ms. Wessie. Take a moment to consider Mr. and Mrs. Sabine, and Happy Face and Mrs. McBride, Louisiana Radio Male and Fortenberry Female. Take a moment to think about the contribution 14 red wolves made to the future of the species. And think about the contribution you can make. ■

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*Red wolf left the mountains, drifting west and south, watched itself vanish from a vanishing world until there was almost nowhere to howl and the last vivid forms of its pure spirit prepared themselves to leave this earth.*

*Just before red wolf leapt into nonexistence, it was trapped out of the wild, taken in cages from the thickets of coastal southeast Texas where it had been driven by history, left to prowl at night, scavenging mesquite beans and cactus fruits.*

*For generations there was no far traveling. The unseen walls of lost habitat became the chain link of breeding pens. The great skills went unused. Sharp sight, keen hearing, shape-changing stealth. Great endurance, silent speed over forest litter, tolerance of the deepest cold... Generations without a hunt... Generations without a proper den. The young knew nothing of the world. Had no wildness in their hearts, no weather in their fur. After three generations, all the old ones were dead and there was not a wild red wolf in the world. Only shadows of wolves. Pale flames of red wolf spirit licked the cages.*

*Then the red wolf was returned to the old places, freed.*

Christopher Camuto,  
*Journeying Toward the Cherokee Mountains*