

Tracking the Pack

It's Time for Pups Again . . .

by Lori Schmidt, Wolf Curator,
International Wolf Center

It seems like just yesterday that Center staff, members, visitors and nannies were anxiously awaiting the arrival of Shadow and Malik, arctic wolf pups who were about to add a little life to our aging wolf exhibit—and add a little life they did. Thousands of visitors to the exhibit and the Web site watched the changing dynamics of our wolf exhibit as Shadow and Malik matured, and MacKenzie,

Lucas and Lakota aged and retired. Well, it's been four years, and it's time once again to add life to an aging exhibit. This article is dedicated to the Wolf Pup Plan for summer 2004.

The Basic Pup Plan

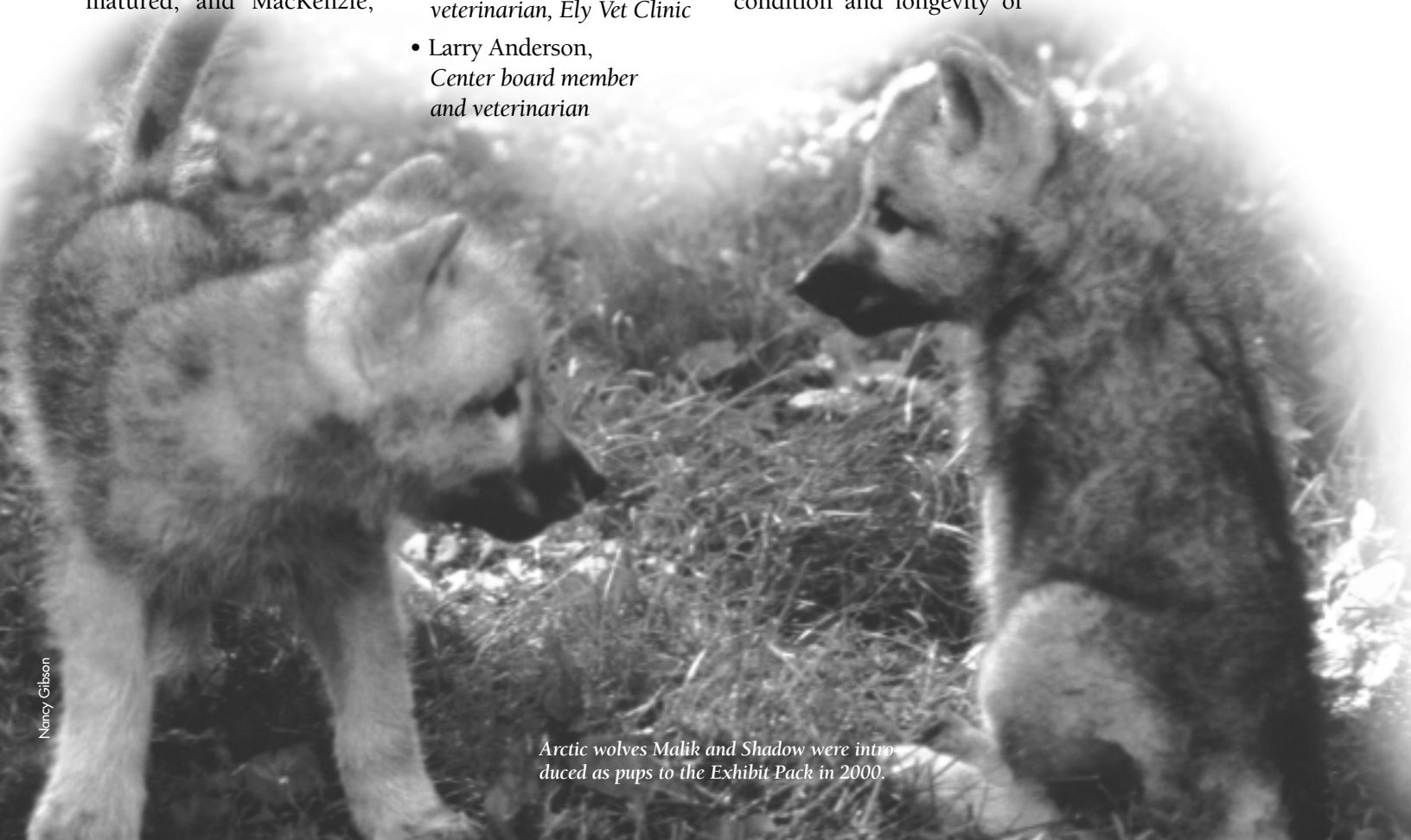
The key players in developing and approving the Wolf Pup Plan were

- Lori Schmidt, *wolf curator*
- Chip Hanson, *veterinarian, Ely Vet Clinic*
- Larry Anderson, *Center board member and veterinarian*

- Dave Mech, *Center board member and wolf biologist*
- Nancy Gibson, *Center board member and naturalist*
- Gretchen Diessner, *assistant director*
- Walter Medwid, *executive director*

The pups will be acquired from Bear County USA in Rapid City, South Dakota, the same place that provided MacKenzie, Lucas, Lakota and Kiana in 1993. We were happy with the behavior, pelage, physical condition and longevity of

the 1993 litter and hope to have a similar experience in 2004. Three pups will be purchased, preferably two females and one male, possibly with a black color phase similar to MacKenzie, but this is dependent on the litter whelped. The pups are expected to be born sometime between April 24 and May 6. They will be removed from their wolf parents and introduced to the wolf care staff around 10 days of age to begin the socialization process. The staff will spend 3 to 4 days at Bear Country USA to



Arctic wolves Malik and Shadow were introduced as pups to the Exhibit Pack in 2000.



transition the pups to bottle-feeding before heading back to Minnesota.

Socializing wolf pups to humans involves spending much time with them early in the socialization period, and then gradually less as the pups grow older. Socialized wolf pups generally display more relaxed behavior and can be handled for veterinary care and facility maintenance.

Why Add Pups Now? Aren't the Arctics Only Four Years Old?

After the 1993 litter was retired from the exhibit in fall 2002, only Shadow and Malik remained. The Center's mission is to teach the world about wolves with captive ambassadors representing wild wolves. Two males are not very representative of a wild wolf pack structure. The addition of pups will

likely mean more play behavior as the pups develop their social skills and find their place in the pack. Pups also tend to bring out play behavior in adults. As the pups mature, pack dynamics may change, offering the public an opportunity to appreciate the world of a social pack animal. The arctics will be strong, six-year-old wolves when the new pups reach sexual maturity and will likely make a strong show of dominance to maintain a rank order.

Why Did the Center Select Three Pups?

In 2000, when Shadow and Malik were raised and added to the Exhibit Pack, the alpha female, MacKenzie, was extremely friendly to and protective of the young wolves. In 2004, the new pups will be meeting two males. Our thinking is that the males may be care-giving but

with less intensity than the female was. So, the basis of this plan is that the three pups will help reinforce each other in the presence of the two adults. We plan to encourage an extremely strong bond among littermates and have them visit daily with the arctic wolves through the fence. The pups will be introduced to Malik and Shadow by early August through a structured process of controlled and monitored interactions. Throughout summer, the pups can be viewed during daily

programs at the Center or via a Web cam in the pup nursery and enclosure. After the introduction, the exhibit Web cams should display some of the action of the Exhibit Pack.

The Center will offer a nanny program as a fundraiser to help cover the cost of adding the pups to the exhibit. Nannies will assist in caring for the wolves, recording behavioral observations, and conducting educational programs. Behavioral observation team members will also be needed to provide 24-hour monitoring during the week of the introduction. Check our Web site www.wolf.org for details and an application for both programs.

This is an exciting time for the International Wolf Center, and many people are needed to make this introduction of new pups successful. Please check the Web site to get involved as a nanny, behavioral observation team member, visitor to the Center or observer on the Web site. ■



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