

# Personal Encounter

## The Reality of Living with Wolves

by Barbara Marks

**M**y husband, Bill, and I raise good old American beef on the Marks WY Bar Ranch in the Blue Range of eastern Arizona. The Blue is rough but beautiful country. The ranch has been in the family since 1891, and we're proud of how we care for the land and our animals. Our married children want nothing more than to come back someday to this ranch to live. Whether they can is another story.

We protested the plan to reintroduce wolves in this ranching community, but we lost, and the Aspen pack—two adults and three pups—were released nearby in July 2004. After the pups started attacking cattle and dogs in September, U.S. Fish and Wildlife wolf project officials captured them. But the two radio-collared adults remained free, making passes through the Blue area, antagonizing dogs and messing with the cattle. The culmination came in early April 2005.

Raccoons had been getting into some of our animal feed for about a week. Part of our dogs' job is to keep those animals away. On this day, two of our dogs, Rocky and Drago, had been going in and out of the house. They are top-notch cow dogs and our best friends, too. That evening, our three pups that are in a pen near the

feed storage building started barking, getting Rocky and Drago interested in checking things out. Earlier in the day I had listened for the wolves with the telemetry receiver the government had loaned us, but I heard no signals. Based on this and the fact that the wolf project had sent word that the Aspens were several miles away, I let the dogs go outside.

Bill and I were just starting to eat dinner when suddenly we heard the dogs barking. In the time it took to wonder what they were barking at, the commotion escalated. I jumped up and opened the door, nearly getting knocked down as Rocky and Drago burst into the house. Grabbing the telemetry unit, I rushed outside to check for signals while Bill got his jacket and flashlight to check on the other dogs that were raising Cain. After getting strong signals for both wolves, I went back into the house and discovered that Rocky had a wound on his nose, a bump on his head and a horrible bite on his hip. A very strong odor was on him. Drago had wet spots and a slight odor on him, too. Both dogs flinched with pain when I touched the backs of their legs. Never had I seen such terror in a dog's eyes before that night. I pray they never have to experience that again, and we are so grateful they are alive.

Bill came back, saying the other dogs and the horses were okay and for me to call someone in the wolf project while he checked on the cattle we had nearby, cow-calf pairs and pregnant cows we had brought into the fields on our property. We had done this to keep them away from the Aspen pack because we had been having problems—bobbed tails (wolves often tear a cow's tail off), calves missing, a cow that went off a bluff and cows exhibiting behavior typical when wolves are around. Bill found the cows near our house stirred up, and a calf was limping. The wolf project team arrived, but by then the wolves' signals were weak. That soon changed. The Aspens returned and remained nearby throughout the night. I heard them howl at 11:15.

Both the calf and the dog were officially confirmed as wolf attacks. Rocky was extremely sore, and we had to give him antibiotics and wound care under a veterinarian's direction. The wolves stayed close by, and we never knew what each night might bring.

We are not the first ranchers this has happened to on the Blue and in other places for that matter. Since September 11, 2004, there have been incidents with the Aspen pack. Two pups even traveled many rough miles to maim and kill several cattle on another ranch. Nobody can understand a situation like this until they experience it firsthand. We awaken

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to the dogs barking, our hearts racing as we run outside to check. The phone ringing at all hours, neighbors calling to tell us the wolves are heading our way. Warning shots piercing the night at 2 a.m. as a wolf approaches a neighbor's horses and dogs. Then we agonize, waiting for dawn's light and what it may reveal. This is our reality; this is life with wolves.

Others besides ranchers are affected also. Areas are off-limits to use, recreationists can't take the family dog because a dog's presence is considered a provocation. Guides fear for their valuable hunting dogs. Campers and hunters approach us when we are out checking the cattle, and they tell us stories about wolves coming into their camps and confronting them on hikes. We ask them to inform the wolf office, but they say they are afraid to report incidents

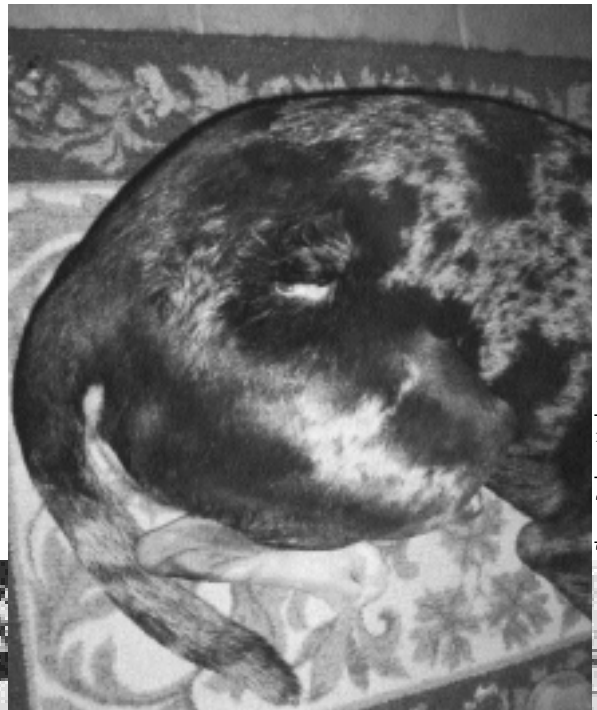
because if a wolf turns up dead, they would be the first suspects!

Wolves and grizzly bears were removed from this area because of their destructiveness toward livestock, their aggression, and their gravitation toward humans. Now the wolves are back, and history repeats itself. Guess we're pretty smart after all, because we knew this would happen. And we're the ones hurting the most. ■

*Barbara Marks lives on the Marks WY Bar Ranch in the Blue Range in eastern Arizona.*

*Below: Barbara Marks' dog Rocky was bitten on his hip during an attack by a wolf in April 2005.*

*Bottom: Barbara Marks' dog Rocky and a calf a few days after Rocky was attacked by a wolf.*



Photos: Barbara Marks

