



## Tracking the Pack

### Watching the Exhibit Pack Sparks Memories of Earlier Times

by Lori Schmidt, Wolf Curator, International Wolf Center

It's an exciting time for the International Wolf Center. Wolf care staff, nannies and volunteers successfully raised Grizzer, Maya and Nyssa, the Center's new pups, in 2004. Their transition into pack life was smooth, and the winter season brought the expected dominance displays between the females. Wolf watchers also saw a change in the dominance of the Center's long-established arctic wolves. Malik was always considered more dominant until the pups were introduced, but Shadow has clearly taken on the role of disciplinarian and leader of this pack.

As the staff recorded the wolves' behavior throughout fall and winter, they began to notice some inter-

esting similarities between the current Exhibit Pack and earlier ones. The obvious similarity is the return of a black wolf, Nyssa, to the Exhibit Pack. Since the retirement of MacKenzie, the Center's previous black wolf, the pack has lacked this color phase. Watching Nyssa has brought back memories of MacKenzie's time in the exhibit. Nyssa, similar to MacKenzie, displays intense dominance behaviors, vying for the top female role.

Another striking reminder of past pack members is Maya's facial characteristics, especially her eyes, which staff noticed are similar to those of Kiana, one of the Center's original wolves, in their piercing yellow color.



Lynn and Donna Rogers/www.bearstudy.org



Sherry Jokinen

Also, Maya can be very intense in displaying her dominance over Nyssa, similar to Kiana's aggression toward former packmate Lakota.

Dominance displays are not restricted to the female wolves. Whenever there's a group of wolves, observers are likely to see a pack mobbing. This behavior is best described as the higher-ranking wolves focusing on one individual. The behavior may start out as a game of chase, with a bit of nipping. Before long, an intimidated, lower-ranking wolf may show weakness with a tucked tail and a few yips, leading to more biting, headshaking and grabbing.

Maya (above) with her striking yellow eyes reminds staff members of Kiana, (above left), one of the Center's first wolves.

These displays are more intense during winter but can occur all year long.

Wolf care staff member Sherry Jokinen recently photographed a mobbing of Maya. She recalled a similar scene with Lakota a few years earlier. A search of the photo database revealed not only a similar scene but one occurring in the same area of the pen. Adding pups to the exhibit has certainly sparked memories of the packs from years gone by. ■



Sherry Jokinen

The mobbing of Maya in December 2004 (above) was remarkably similar to a mobbing of Lakota, another former pack member, in December 2001.



Sherry Jokinen