

Checked Out by a Wolf!

by Art Beyer

I learned early in my career as a field biologist that observing red wolves in the wild is difficult. As a volunteer in 1989, I felt I knew each pack inside and out from daily tracking, but I had yet to see a wolf during my first three months in the recovery area because of the flat terrain and thick vegetation. Even now, aside from the times we remove a wolf from a trap or sneak up on one to get a sighting or to locate a den, we just don't see them. Occasionally I'll spot wolves during telemetry flights. I've watched adults chasing deer and pups playing together, and once I watched a wolf chasing off a couple of dogs that had wandered too close to its den. However, even from the air it is difficult to see much detail because of the vegetation.

But a few years ago, something extraordinary happened. Mange had cropped up in an area of the recovery region, and the field team wanted to observe some wolves. Mange mites, parasites that burrow into the skin, can be life threatening. The intense itching and loss of the protective coat can cause the wolf to suffer extreme weight loss and, in cold weather, hypothermia.

So, one midsummer day, I went looking for a radio-collared female and picked up her signal in a cornfield. Wolves seem to prefer tall corn, maybe because there is shade to provide a cool spot, and there are fewer bugs to contend with. I crawled into the field and saw her lying down in one of the rows. She was a good distance away, but with binoculars I could see her well. She was facing me, her eyes closed. Before long, she lifted her head briefly and looked away. Then suddenly, she stared back in my direction.

I thought she would turn and run off, as wolves normally do, so I looked hard for signs of mange. But instead of bolting, the wolf got up, lowered her ears, crouched, and began slowly walking toward me. It was eerie. I had never encountered a wolf that didn't run, and this one seemed to be stalking me as if I were prey.

Through the binoculars, she appeared to be about 20 yards away, so I let her get close enough for a good look before I whistled. She turned immediately and disappeared from sight. When I got out of the corn, I wiped the sweat from my eyes and listened again for her signal. I found it—coming right from where I had been lying in the corn.

Maybe she was just curious, trying to figure out just what exactly she had seen. I can't say for certain, but it was an experience I won't forget.

And best of all, she looked healthy and mange-free!

Art Beyer is lead biologist of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Red Wolf Recovery Team in northeastern North Carolina.

Are you really serious about planning your next Canoe Country Adventure?



- In-depth canoe route journals of the BWCAN and Quetico
- Savvy fishing advice by area experts
- Inspirational wilderness experience essays
- Fascinating features on canoe country history, wildlife, people and places
- Canoe camping secrets - selecting the right gear and how to use it
- Conservation and wilderness management issues

The *Boundary Waters Journal* features all the information and inspiration you need to truly enjoy every trip to BWCAN and Quetico. Every quarterly issue is packed with exclusive "where to go" advice by area experts and guides. 108 pages of compelling outdoor journalism and stunning color photography.

Subscribe to the *Boundary Waters Journal* Today!

The FIRST issue is FREE with each subscription when you mention this ad!

Toll Free 1-800-548-7319 • 1-218-365-6184

Subscribe Online: www.boundarywatersjournal.com

Be sure to mention this ad to receive your FREE issue.

1 Year 4 Issues + 1 issue free \$21 • 2 Year 8 Issues + 1 issue free \$40

3 Year 12 Issues + 1 issue free \$57 • 5 Year 20 Issues + 1 issue free \$90

All 2, 3 and 5 year subscriptions include a FREE 24"x 36" color planning map of Quetico/BWCAN.

Since 1987 the *Boundary Waters Journal* has been all about — sharing the passion for wilderness canoe country

Brad McPhee, Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium



Field biologists do not often see red wolves in the wild unless they are removing one from a trap or sneaking up on one to get a sighting or to locate a den.