



Tracking the Pack

The Process of Forming an “Ambassador” Wolf Pack

by Lori Schmidt, Wolf Curator, International Wolf Center

Visitors to the International Wolf Center in Ely, Minnesota, or to the Center’s Web site at www.wolf.org are familiar with the Exhibit Pack, comprised of four gray wolves: two arctic subspecies and two Great Plains subspecies. The Center’s wolves are spayed and neutered, so pups must be acquired from another source. Obviously, the arctic and Great Plains subspecies and the new pups are not genetically related, so how do they come to form a pack? (In the wild a wolf

pack forms when a male and female dispersed from separate packs in the same region meet, mate and produce pups.) The answer to this question has two components: one, the influence of hormones on the wolves; and two, socializing the pups to the adults through daily contact.

Center staff have a great deal of experience socializing wolf pups not only to their human caretakers but also to the wolves who will be their future pack-mates. Living in a social pack is inherent to wolves’

Wolf Care Staff member Sherry Jokinen holding Denali to greet Maya.



nature. The Center provides the wolves the opportunity to live in a pack, and the wolves display the behavior. This behavioral display is influenced in part by the presence of a hormone called prolactin. Prolactin is a nurturing hormone and is responsible for parental behavior in mammals. Both male and female wolves produce this hormone and demonstrate many parental behaviors when

pups are present, including facial licking, greeting, whining and regurgitation, a form of pup feeding.

MACKENZIE 1993 - 2008

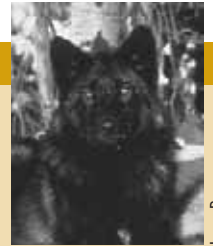
International Wolf Center Experiences a Death in the Pack

MacKenzie, one of two wolves in the International Wolf Center’s Retired Pack, appears to have died in her sleep on Wednesday, May 21, 2008. She was 15 years old. Wolves in the wild may live 8 to 10 years. Captive wolves sometimes live as long as 14 to 16 years.

A Great Plains subspecies of the gray wolf, MacKenzie was the dominant female in the Center’s Exhibit Pack from the time she was a pup, and continued as the dominant female when she was moved to retirement in 2002. Wolf Curator Lori Schmidt said, “MacKenzie has

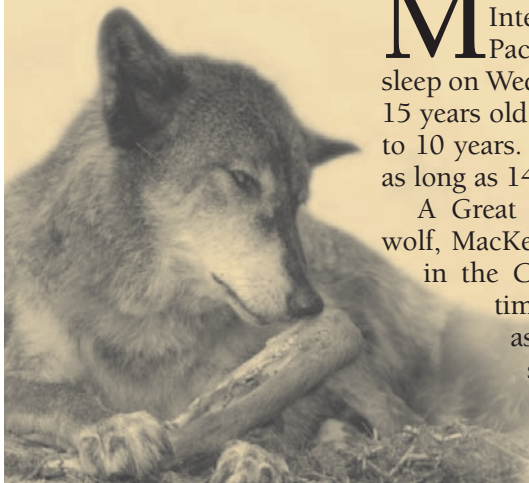
been with us since she was 10 days old and helped teach about her wild counterparts to over 650,000 people at the Center and a countless number on the Web. She lived a long life and was very important to our staff, board, volunteers, members and others across the world.”

MacKenzie will be cremated and her ashes spread at a location in the Ely area to be determined by Center staff members. Donations will be accepted for the Wolf Care Fund in her name and will be used for wolf care needs. They may be mailed to the International Wolf Center, 1396 Highway 169, Ely, MN 55731, or contributed online at www.wolf.org.



Lynn Rogers

Wolf Care Staff



Dr. Chip Hansen of the Ely Veterinary Clinic, with Vermilion Community College student Kristen Flowers, examining Denali.



Awen Briem



International Wolf Center

Northern Rocky Mountain Wolves Temporarily Regain Endangered Species Act Protection

On July 18, 2008, the U.S. District Court in Missoula, Montana, granted a preliminary injunction that reversed the federal government's March 28 delisting of the Northern Rocky Mountain wolf population. For more details, see www.wolf.org.

With all pack members stimulated to care for the pups, the pack bond is likely to be stronger, and pup survival may be enhanced.

Prolactin has a definite yearly cycle, increasing during spring, when pups are normally born, and decreasing as winter approaches. The Center's 2008 pups were acquired from the Wildlife Science Center in Forest Lake, Minnesota. From the time the pups arrived on-site, the adult wolves were stimulated by their presence, and that stimulation increased the production of prolactin.

The second component to successful pup introduction is socialization. Pups being socialized to humans require about three months



International Wolf Center

Grizzer and Maya sniffing a pup blanket presented to them by Wolf Curator Lori Schmidt as part of the acclimation process.

to establish a trusting bond with their human caretakers. This bond must be strong enough to allow the necessary veterinary care to occur with minimal stress. During socialization, pups are immersed in human contact for 24 hours a day; humans feed, clean and interact with the pups to reduce fear avoidance be-

havior. But it is critical that the adult wolves begin bonding as well. This is accomplished by letting the adult wolves observe and sniff the pups through a hardware cloth fence to establish their first bond. This protected daily interaction continues during the first three months of the pups' lives until they reach

a minimum weight of 30 pounds and are physically strong enough to interact with the adults face-to-face.

To read about the introduction of the new pups this year, please log on to www.wolf.org and review the archived logs for August 2008. ■