



Canis lupus

A Periodic Newsletter of the California Wolf Center

Summer 2008

Remembering our Ambassadors

Help us remember our ambassador wolves who have passed away.

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In Appreciation



Thank you to all who helped make our Wolf Awareness Week event possible.

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The Mexican Wolf Program and the California Wolf Center

The California Wolf Center celebrates eleven years of participation in one of the most important recovery programs of our time.

In the late fall of 1997, a caravan containing the first Mexican gray wolves entrusted to the care of the California Wolf Center departed from the Hillcrest Park Zoo in Clovis, New Mexico. That 14-hour, overnight drive was the beginning of the California Wolf Center's involvement in the Mexican Wolf Species Survival Program (SSP). Over the following eleven years, the Center has hosted and bred these highly endangered top predators. Our participation in this program has been highlighted by the release of one of our 'California girls,' Female 667, with her mate, M512, and their pups, in July of 2004. Today we host 21 Mexican gray wolves, including our latest additions: a litter of pups born on April 16, 2008. We are proud to be one of the largest hosting and breeding facilities for Mexican gray wolves in the United States, and we continue to make significant contributions to the program. At present, our resident population includes 4 packs of Mexican wolves, with pack sizes varying from two to twelve wolves. Our ability to participate in the SSP, and to support the survival of the Mexican grey wolf in the wild, relies totally on your support of the California Wolf Center. We couldn't do it without you!

Breeding Pair 2008

This year the Mexican Wolf SSP again charged us with the breeding of male wolf 660 and female wolf 749. Last year, these wolves produced 8 healthy pups, thus creating our largest pack of Mexican wolves. 660 and 749 were successful again this year, contributing another litter and making a great



Mexican wolves are among the rarest land mammals in the world. The California Wolf Center has participated in the recovery of this critically endangered species for over a decade.

contribution to the Mexican wolf population. The pups' mother, female 749, is genetically one of the most valuable wolves in the SSP, so her second breeding success is a tremendous boost to the captive program. There is also a good possibility that the adults and the 2008 pups will be released in the wild later this year, leaving the yearlings at the Wolf Center to remain a part of the captive breeding program.

From Pups to Predators

For the first time in the history of our facility, we have the pleasure of hosting a multi-generational pack of Mexican wolves. We are housing the parents, the yearlings from last year's breeding, and the new pups from this year together in one enclosure. The entire pack is taking part in raising the new pups, just as it would in the wild. It is exciting for us to see the parents and older siblings guiding the new pups as they explore their world.

Wolves depend on their communal nature for survival and have evolved over millions of years into highly intelligent, social animals. For this reason, a pack will spend quite a bit of time teaching young pups how to be good wolves.

Much like we teach our children to respect their elders, to work cooperatively with others, and to be safe wherever they are, our wolves are teaching their young how to live peacefully within the pack hierarchy, how to hunt as part of a larger group, and how to survive under harsh conditions. It is critical that young wolves learn how to work as part of a team to bring down large prey animals that are capable of defending themselves and inflicting severe injuries on a wolf. Wolves could not hunt effectively if they did not work closely together, so communication skills and cooperation must be learned early. Wolves must also learn how to show deference to higher-ranking animals so that they can avoid conflict within the pack. Some young wolves will develop their skills and personality traits to become future leaders of a pack.

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In Memoriam

We commemorate the wolves who have passed away this year by sharing our memories of them. We would especially like to remember the deceased members of our aging Ambassador pack for the wonder they have added to our lives.



m1134, m1131, and m1132



Tony Norton, California Wolf Center

Tragically, during the writing of this newsletter, three of the five genetically valuable Mexican wolf pups from our 2008 litter passed away. While life in a wolf pack can be unpredictable, and it is not uncommon to lose young pups to a variety of causes, we felt it was important to inform you, our valued members and supporters, of this sad news.

These pups died of natural causes. A full examination of the pups revealed no evidence of disease, though we are continuing our strict sanitation protocols as always. Rattlesnake bite is highly suspected as the cause of death for at least one of the pups and perhaps for all three. We have taken steps to minimize all risks to the health and safety of the two remaining pups, all of our adult wolves, and our staff.

While it is heartbreaking to lose pups, we are moving forward because there is a reasonable chance that the remaining pups and their parents will be released in the wild, continuing their contribution to wolf recovery.

Nome (1995 - 2008)



Nome, our long time alpha female ambassador, passed away on January 13, 2008. She was a strong, healthy wolf and died of natural causes. Nome was the last remaining wolf from the 1995 litter that also included former alpha male, Denali.

Nome was a feisty wolf who was clearly in charge. The other wolves in the pack all deferred to her, especially around food. According to volunteer Pam Howard, Nome held her tail up high and “pranced” when she walked, as if she always had somewhere to go. Nome was charismatic and mysterious, as if a lot more was going on in her head than she’d ever let us know. She lived a good, long life and was surrounded by her pack when she passed.

Our ambassador wolves teach people about the importance of wolves in the wild, and Nome always played her part by making an appearance for the public and by displaying typical wolf behaviors so that people could learn about pack dynamics.

McKinley (1996 - 2008)



McKinley died on April 15, 2008. He was a very shy wolf who many of you may not have gotten a chance to see. He had a dark saddle with a bright white head and belly, and he had exaggerated black “eyeliner” around his eyes. When sporting his full winter coat, he was a magnificent wolf to see.

McKinley was a mid-ranking male who tended to stay out of confrontations. He also avoided contact with humans for the most part, which tended to give his personality an air of mystery. Staff who had the opportunity to observe him when no one else was around remembered him as being quiet and curious and as having an affectionate relationship with Barrow and Katmai, two fellow ambassador wolves.

McKinley was a great example of the shy nature of wolves in the wild. He was almost as difficult to spot as a wild wolf, but, if you got a chance to see him, the memory would last a lifetime.

Kodiak (1996 - 2008)



We found Kodiak in a den on May 14, 2008. He had passed away peacefully in the cool darkness.

Kodiak was a large male with a bluish gray saddle. He was the omega male of the Denali pack. While he was often picked on by the rest of the pack, this was all part of his natural role as a lower ranking wolf. The omega wolf performs very important functions in a pack, including helping to reduce stress, so it is critical to understand that his interactions with the pack were part of a natural process.

According to our Executive Director, Patrick Valentino, Kodiak would always move slowly during captures. It was as if he went into slow motion. Kyle Yonkees observed that he would also “stand guard,” ever watchful of the human presence.

Kodiak was often visible during programs, so many of you may have known him. He had a balance of shyness and curiosity that truly represented wild wolves.

Mukluk (1996 - 2008)



Tony Norton, California Wolf Center

Mukluk died of natural causes on June 27, 2008. He, like Kodiak and McKinley, was a member of the 1996 litter of Alaskan wolves: the fun bunch, as they were affectionately called. This litter was born to Rosie and Bright Eyes and grew up under the watchful care of a young Denali before he took over as alpha male. Mukluk fit in well with this energetic and fun-loving group.

Once he reached adulthood, Mukluk became a high ranking wolf who would stand his ground in a challenge. He was assertive around food but could be shy around people. Volunteer Christie Otten remembers that Mukluk was her favorite wolf to photograph. “He could lie back and look at you with such regalness that you felt honored to witness the true depth of the wolf within. In the very next instance, he would give you a wink and grin and remind you that life may be hard and serious (and sometimes outright cruel), but it can also be full of love, companionship, respect, and FUN!”

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Pups learn many of their survival skills through play with their littermates and with older wolves, and our new litter is no exception. They will learn about pack hierarchy, communication, and even hunting through play. They learn about the body language, scent communication, and vocalizations they will need to live and work with their fellow wolves. To humans, this play may seem cute or funny, but it is actually a crucial part of wolf development and survival. Their finely tuned communication skills and the cooperation that they learn as pups are what allow them to live in harmonious family units and survive in the wild.



Tony Norton, California Wolf Center

While we wait to find out whether our breeding pack will be released, we can use the time we have with them to learn how a wolf pack relies on all of its members to contribute to the pack's survival. Our new pups have been excellent students so far, and their parents and siblings are wonderful teachers. We hope that they will soon be able to apply their lessons in the wild, contributing to the recovery of one of the rarest land mammals in the world.

Retracing Wolf Tracks in Time

Amaroq Weiss

Wolves may have once played a prominent role in the ecosystems of California. One researcher asks the question, "Can they return?"

The California Wolf Center and Defenders of Wildlife are collaboratively funding a research project investigating evidence of wolves' historical presence in California. Funding has been provided through grants from the Wendy P. McCaw Foundation and Dr. Jerry Rowitch, as well as from general membership donations to the Wolf Center.

Most published texts on wolves that discuss the species' historical range in the lower 48 United States exclude most of California, if not the entire state. However, much of California has long boasted habitat suitable for wolves; a variety of suitable wolf prey base, including elk, deer and bison; and migration corridors into the state from the north and east that wolves could easily traverse. On this basis, common sense dictates that wolves would have been present in California -- and evidence found to date supports this hypothesis.

While several biologists and freelance journalists have published peer-reviewed papers or articles for general public consumption that discuss the potential for wolves to return to California, only a handful of published works exist that evaluate known evidence of historical wolf presence in the state. These include two published in 1987 and 1991, each of which reported on both paleontological evidence and historical reports from 1750-1900's. There was also a 2001 article that discussed widely-ranging cultural and physical evidence of wolves demonstrated by California native tribal language, artwork, dance regalia, and stories. Finally, a 2003 article touched on historical evidence of wolves as indicated by northeastern California tribal stories. These papers provide tantalizing clues to support the historical presence of Mother Nature's "top dog" in the Golden State but are likely only the tip of the iceberg. More recently conducted research has revealed additional evidence to substantiate and flesh out the record, and it is believed that any future such efforts would continue to yield important clues.

The project is being conducted by Amaroq Weiss, former western regional director of species conservation for Defenders of Wildlife and a board member for the Center. For the past eleven years, Amaroq has specialized in conservation and recovery politics, law, ecology, and social issues regarding wolves in the Northern Rockies, Alaska and the Pacific west. Currently an independent consultant, her background as a biologist, attorney and years of experience in wolf issues, as well as 15 years living in various parts of California, enable her to bring unique insights and perspectives to the project. The project will wrap up this summer, and a paper reporting its findings will be prepared for public distribution. The newsletter for the California Wolf Center will provide interested readers with an update in a future issue.



Tony Norton, California Wolf Center

Wolf Recovery in the Grand Canyon Ecoregion

Deb Westcott

This pristine landscape could provide an invaluable wildlife corridor for recovering populations of wolves.



Tony Norton, California Wolf Center

As a long-time volunteer at the California Wolf Center, I am always interested in issues and activities related to wolf recovery. For this reason, the Grand Canyon Wolf Recovery Project caught my eye. This project is staffed by conservation organizations that support wolf recovery in the Grand Canyon Ecoregion (GCE).

Imagine sitting in the shade near the Grand Canyon and educating the public about the possibility of the Grand Canyon Ecoregion as Mexican Wolf habitat. Sign me up!

The GCE ranges from the high plateaus of southern Utah to the Mogollon rim of southeastern Arizona. Numerous studies have shown that this area includes some of the most suitable wolf habitat in Arizona. GCE is the "last, best place" for Mexican wolf recovery because, among other things, there is low road density, a good prey base (elk and mule deer), low human and livestock populations, and mostly national park, national forest, and national monument land open for colonization.

The southern boundary of the GCE connects with the northern portion of the current Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area. This would allow wolves an opportunity to naturally disperse out of the existing recovery area, enabling them to increase their population size and maintain genetic variability. At present, this is not possible because management protocol requires that wolves that wander outside the Blue Range be returned to the recovery area immediately.

Biologists suggest that the Grand Canyon Ecoregion could support up to 200 wolves. Due to the ecological benefits of wolves in the environment, wolf recovery in the GCE would restore balance to this area.

I felt very privileged to participate in this project. I look forward to spending my 2008 summer vacation at the North Rim!



Speak Your Mind

*Thoughts from our
dedicated volunteers*

Tales of a Wild Life

Laura Kelly

I was first introduced to the California Wolf Center by Dr. Dan Moriarty at the University of San Diego in 2001. Wolves had really never crossed my mind before getting involved with the Center, but now they have become the primary focus in my career! After volunteering, being an intern, and finally becoming an employee at the Center, I joined US Fish and Wildlife Service as a volunteer on the Mexican Wolf Recovery Project in Arizona and New Mexico in 2004. I made \$15 a day and lived through it, having some of the best times of my life. I learned telemetry, packed mules while releasing wolves into the Gila Wilderness, trapped, tracked and navigated in the backcountry, and handled over 50 endangered Mexican wolves!



I then applied for a Wolf Technician position with the Arizona Department of Game and Fish, as well as a position on the Winter Wolf Predation Study in Yellowstone. I got both and felt like I was really on my way to being a Wildlife Biologist. I spent March in Yellowstone watching wolves for 16 hours a day and investigating kill sites in often remote locations. It was a cold, cold time but also another rewarding moment in my career, full of new experiences and good friends.

In 2005, I was hired as a Wolf Biologist for Arizona Department of Game and Fish and the Mexican Wolf Recovery Project. I then rejoined my former colleagues at the Wolf Center in October of 2007. I filled in as the main educator before joining another Yellowstone Winter Study. Once that was completed, I took a position with the Division of Wildlife in Colorado.

I'm now out enjoying the field again, continuing to contribute to conservation efforts around the US. This was all made possible by my initial work with the California Wolf Center. If you are interested in learning more about field work or in getting involved at the Wolf Center as a volunteer, please contact the Center at 760-765-0030 or at info@californiawolfcenter.org.

Rewards of a Job Well Done

Christie Otten

I have been volunteering at the California Wolf Center for two years now. During the week, I work as a Research Technician in the Genetics lab at the Center for Conservation and Research for Endangered Species (CRES) at the San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park. On a daily basis, I run tests on samples to determine the sex of mammals and birds (specifically striped hyenas and California condors), to confirm the paternity of an animal, to help distinguish the identity of a species, and to assist with local conservation projects.

I first became acquainted with the Wolf Center in 2006 when I attended the Wildlife Handling Course offered there each January. For three days, I was totally immersed in the atmosphere. I soon discovered that while some people were sent there through their employer, some came at their own expense for work-related needs, and others came to learn for the sake of learning. I knew it would be an intense course considering the amount of information to be covered, the extreme weather conditions, and the number of wolves to handle on our last day of class. However, I was impressed on that final day when I realized that not only did I feel prepared and confident that I knew what I needed to perform the final vet check on the wolves competently, but the crew and staff were equally prepared and very easy to work alongside. After that experience, I was hooked.

I have had many people remark on why I choose to travel one and one half hours each way to a remote center to help feed and care for wild animals on my days off. Number one, I do not come to the Center every weekend, as I would get worn out fast if I tried. Nor do I feel as if I am being made to attend or push myself too far. From the very beginning, the Center has given me the opportunity to help with a conservation effort that I feel has been lacking attention for decades. I learn all aspects of wildlife management from feeding to enclosure safety to health checks to monitoring behavior to fundraising. It is the most amazing place I have ever spent my time. The work is dirty and hard but always appreciated and always satisfying. The wolves are aloof and cautious but a joy to watch. The people are as varied as the wolves in age, personality, education, and everything in between. They are also some of the best people I have ever

known. They come when called, whether it is for a fire, a fundraiser, or just to clean poop from enclosures! Being part of this group has exposed me to so many unique opportunities, and I was truly thankful when I looked into the eyes of one of our new Mexican wolf pups this spring and knew that I and the rest of the volunteers were part of its history.

My son died in Iraq recently, and while I took time off work, I found great comfort in being at the Center. My son Henry was a strong advocate for the wolves and had sponsored wolves in Yellowstone since his childhood. The Center not only gave us something "normal" to discuss when he used to call from Iraq but also made my son extremely proud that we were fighting for the wolves' freedom as he was fighting for ours. The support I received from my fellow volunteers kept me grounded and gave me perspective. They asked how I was doing, expressed their concerns, and promptly asked if I wanted to be on poop detail or wash the water tubs. They made me smile and kept me busy. VERY busy.

Now, I try to come up a few times a month and to collect money when I can for the wolves' care and feeding. There is not one person here who does not sacrifice or work his or her hardest. Each and every one of us wants to change the lives of the wolves and the people who come here to visit them. We do our best to educate the public on the reintroduction plans in the past for grey wolves and the present plans for Mexican wolves, and we give students the opportunity to study these animals up close and personal, to discover within themselves the ability to do all the hard work that is needed to manage wildlife.

The Center offers so many people an enormous range of experiences. I could never ask for a better cause to offer my time and energies. I always get back so much more than I could ever give and have made such wonderful new friends in the process. Whether you attend one of our Saturday seminars, attend a three-day course, volunteer your time, or just send a check, please remember the wolves need you... and we need them.



In Appreciation

We would like to extend a very special thank you to all the volunteers, donors, and sponsors who made our 2007 Wolf Awareness Week an outstanding success. We raised over \$16,000 which was used to aid our participation in the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program. We hope we can count on your support again this October when we celebrate the 10 year anniversary of Mexican Wolf Reintroduction.

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Tony Norton, California Wolf Center

Volunteer of the Year: Hayes Anderson

Shawn Kessler



Each and every volunteer who contributes his or her time at the California Wolf Center is a valuable asset to the continuing efforts of the facility. The multitude of tasks that volunteers are responsible for, from stuffing envelopes to feeding the wolves to repairing enclosures to answering telephones, requires a certain dedication.

Three times a week, Hayes Anderson arrives at the Center around 8:50 am. As a retiree, Hayes could be spending his time relaxing. Instead, he has devoted his time attending to the many tasks essential to caring for our wolves and contributing to the conservation of a critically endangered species. For the past four years, Hayes has been involved in all aspects of running the Center. He has been a leader, helping train interns and fellow volunteers in husbandry techniques, and his experience as an educator is apparent as he leads tours. In addition to donating his time, Hayes is also a long time member of the Wolf Center. He works hard and comes to the facility when we need him, sharing his time, his skills, and his wonderful personality.

It is these characteristics that exemplify Hayes' importance to the California Wolf Center. Without his help and the help of the rest of our dedicated team, we would not be able to accomplish the numerous chores involved in caring for our animals. Thank you, Hayes, for your generosity and hard work. The title of 2007 Volunteer of the Year is well deserved.

Evening Tours at the California Wolf Center!

We are pleased to announce several dates for our annual evening tours. We are offering three unique opportunities to observe our wolves at dusk when they are most active. Please join us at **6 pm on August 23, August 30, and September 13** for a chance to see wild wolf behavior in a whole new light. The cost is \$20 per person. Reservations are required, and space is limited, so call 760-765-0030 today to secure your place!





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For more information about the California Wolf Center, visit us on the web at www.californiawolfcenter.org.

California Wolf Center Summer 2008

Remember Our Ambassadors

As some members of our ambassador pack of Alaskan wolves begin to age, they require more care and can begin to develop special needs. These wolves are critical participants in our mission of educating people about wolf biology, ecology, and behavior. They contribute directly to the success of wolf recovery in the wild by helping us teach people how important wolves are to the ecosystems in which they live. As they near the end of their lives, we strive to provide them with a peaceful and comfortable home. Please help us thank them for their role as ambassadors for wild wolves by donating today in support of our ambassador pack.

Please use my tax-deductible donation wherever it is needed most so that the cherished ambassador wolves can continue their valuable work.

___\$500 ___\$100 ___\$50 ___\$35 ___\$25 ___\$10 Other \$_____

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