



Kitan

Tundra wolf who turns two years old this spring

HOWL CHRONICLES

The Wolf Mountain Nature Center

May 2021

562 Hopkins Crandall Rd., Smyrna,
NY 13464

(607) 627-6784

twmncwolves@yahoo.com

TheWolfMountainNatureCenter.org

(a non-profit 501(c)3 organization)
Founded in 2006 by Will Pryor

Head Animal Caretaker's Message...Will Pryor

Reflections from the Mountain...

It's spring!! Well, at least the available daylight hours are more; but as I look out and see a steady accumulating snowfall on this late April day, and notice the woodstove is still warming the bones of all inside (humans & canines), I find two Christmas songs dancing in my head that will not go away...

However, the snows will melt away and the sunny, hot days of summer shall turn everything here multiple shades of green. I can smell the forest if I close my eyes and take it all in.

As we begin our 15th year, I look forward to a return of school groups and increased numbers of visitors coming to learn, appreciate wolves, and experience Wolf Mountain Nature Center.

I glance at my "to do" list for this spring/summer season and it covers two full size sheets of paper! Construction and fencing projects, habitat improvements, landscaping and more await my attention, but as always, I will find a way to "get-er-done."

With the passing of Yana and later, her mate Yukon, our original fox enclosure is now vacant and under renovations in preparations for the arrival of new fox kits later this spring. While new life is always a humbling miracle, I still wish I could slow down the aging process. Five of our fifteen wolves are between 10-13 years old already!

If you would like to volunteer to help us out with labor projects, please contact the Center via email (twmncwolves.com) or phone (607-627-6784.) Leaving a

voicemail is your best bet as we check messages frequently throughout the day.

This summer we have four wonderful college interns with an assortment of skills joining our team. Majoring in Wildlife Conservation, Environmental Biology, Animal Psychology, & Conservation Biology and Ecology, they will be helping in areas such as guided tours, construction projects, animal enrichment activities, food prep, identifying & mapping of indigenous flora & fauna, and public education. I applaud and cherish these young souls who have developed a concern for and advocate for our environment!

Walk in the snow, walk in the rain, smell the forest, listen to the voice of Mother Earth, and walk in balance. Ah ho!

Will





critter capers



though, we *never* shave or cut the fur from the animals, but rather use our fingers to “rake” off the loose fur while interacting with the critters.

While we are not breeding our animals, in fact, all but one male and one female who are not in the same enclosure have been spayed or neutered, many of them still have active hormones. Thus, many of the wolves continue their normal mate-seeking behaviors such as increased howling, growling & grumbling especially among the males who test their powers of assertiveness and the right to be alpha. Kitan has reached sexual maturity (~22 months) and is frequently challenging his father Sequoyah (think of human teenagers pushing the limits as they transition from child to adult.) Disheartening as it



is to witness these sometimes very aggressive displays, it is the natural way of the wolf and usually ends with nothing more than a lot of noise and the occasional superficial scratch. It does however, mean that Caretakers need to be extra vigilant while inside enclosures and not only not interfere or try to stop these confrontations, but to not show favoritism towards any specific wolf as it can cause further animal aggression. We can only be accepted into their pack if we follow the wolf pack rules!



In line with it being the end of mating season (remember wolves only breed once a year) and well into new-born pup season (usually April – May), Caretakers

have noticed many of the younger adult wolves (4-8 year olds), digging and preparing dens. Again, while our animals cannot produce offspring, they do continue to imitate the cyclical behaviors. Some of these new dens are easily large enough for even our most robust Caretakers to easily fit into!

We have also noticed the wolves increasing their hunting behaviors: Dyani has taught Kitan & Tehyah to catch frogs, Sakari & Okwaho have cornered birds, and Cypress & Tauriel managed to trap and conquer a very fat raccoon!



Animal Birthday Celebrations



Wolves, coyotes, and Arctic fox breed only once annually and produce offspring around April – June. This gives the young ones time to mature a bit and learn some basic survival skills before winter arrives. Of course, animals in the wild do not celebrate birthdays with wrapped presents, pinatas, and multi-course meals with cake and ice cream, but it sure provides stimulation, enrichment, and human entertainment!



Director Dialog...Erin Lord-Astles

My first visit to The Wolf Mountain Nature Center (TWMNC) was in late summer of 2013. I was a recent graduate of SUNY-ESF and was elated to find a wolf facility just about an hours' drive from campus. I was eager to turn in my resume and was grateful when Will and Pam granted me an internship. Since then I have worked as a zookeeper, a travelling animal handler, a K-12 educator and a college adjunct instructor. I now also have the honor of serving as the Director for TWMNC.



I believe what so enticed me about TWMNC in 2013 and continues to inspire me now are the many ways in which we are unlike a zoo. I absolutely love zoos and the many benefits they afford. However, TWMNC offers a much different, and in my personal opinion, a more intimate and authentic experience for both the visitors and the animals that call the center home. I believe that's heavily attributed to our environmental enrichment program.



Environment enrichment is a husbandry principle designed to enhance the quality of animal care in captive scenarios by identifying and providing stimuli necessary for optimal physiological and psychological well-being. Simply put, a good enrichment program promotes species appropriate behaviors while giving the animal opportunity and choice over their environment. Which is very relatable; isn't that what we all need to feel happy, what we crave for ourselves?

This presents an interesting challenge for the typical zoo, in which the environment can be very artificial and sterile. You occasionally see zoo animals lazing about, waiting for their next meal to be delivered on schedule. You may see animals

attempting to flee from a crowd of overly rambunctious kids. Worst case scenario, you may see animals engage in maladaptive or stereotypic behaviors such as pacing, rocking, misplaced aggression, or even self-mutilation.

Environmental enrichment is a method used to both ease and deter those negative behaviors. This is not an abstract concept when applied to humans; monotony, inactivity, and isolation are all qualities that can diminish our own lives and excessive stress can have cascading impacts on our health.

While zoos have to actively develop systematic ways to keep their animals healthy in a highly manufactured environment, here the animals enjoy a quality of life similar to that of their wild counterparts. Their enclosures are large enough to roam and run, they're naturally landscaped; they include water features, and have both man-made and animal excavated dens. Animals have the ability to retreat from visitors into their "pack-only" areas if they so choose. Their environments are near replicas of their natural habitat and allow for animals to experience changes in season, to have the occasional interaction with different species like a heckling raven or an unwelcome porcupine, and to experience sensory input as they would in the wild. The animals still are building natural skills needed to adapt to different natural conditions and situations.



continued on next page →

Our socialization program is the foundation of success in our human-canid interactions. Will, Pam, and the rest of our valued volunteers hand rear all of our animals and frequently offer quality social time. That is apparent to anyone who observes the strong bond between caregivers and animals; they are pack members, not just vectors for food. Caregivers also find creative ways to encourage cooperative care through habituation and positive reinforcement. They can easily lay hands on the animals to assess body condition, which reduces stress involved in any future veterinary procedures, like vaccinations.



Their diet is designed to replicate nature and promote species appropriate behavior. You will have no better opportunity to observe pack dynamics than when they're presented with a white tail deer. Novel food items, like raw Easter eggs, are often hidden throughout the enclosure and you may see the canids practicing their foraging skills by gingerly plucking raspberries from bushes or leaping up into a tree to harvest an apple.



During our fall Honoring the Spirit of the Wolf festival, the animals receive a cornucopia of treats packed within carved pumpkins. Their gift packages during our winter holiday event offer an opportunity for cognitive exercise as they puzzle how to get the good smelling things out of the colorfully wrapped boxes. At our summer Wolves and Watermelon event, visitors are delighted to watch our animals study each melon and form a strategy for carrying the heavy object away from their pack mates.

Our animals are healthy and happy because they are afforded a lifestyle that meets their physical and psychological needs. They have the space to allow for independence, as well as the opportunity to interact with

members of their own species as they would in the wild. They are constantly building cognitive skills through the mental exercise our enrichment programs offer. They have as much choice and control over their own lives as possible and pounce at any opportunity for "fun".

Environmental enrichment is a concept that can be applied to our own lives. There is no denying that we too live in a highly artificial environment. Our daily routines and habits don't always allow for us to find time for adventure or passion pursuits. From our animal birthday parties, special events, and weekly guided tours, to our camping with wolves and private photography sessions, TWMNC offers many opportunities for visitors to enrich their lives with a unique and intimate wildlife experience.



Wolf Mountain Nature Center's 15th Anniversary!



2006: Building the 1st wolf enclosure for new wolf pups Nakoa & Natani

July 1, 2021 marks fifteen years since the first two wolves, Nakoa & Natani, arrived at the Center! We have come a long way from having two wolves in a single enclosure to our current status which includes fifteen wolves, four Eastern coyotes, and three Arctic Fox all living in eleven various habitat areas (some larger than nine acres!)

Add to that our expanded gift shop, admissions building, photography platforms, classroom, animal food storage shed, man-made pond, and, beginning this year, an intern/office cabin, plus new enclosures, upgrades to fencing, new nature trails, more programs, and a larger staff, we certainly are growing! We have several surprises in store for 2021 and look forward with excitement to what the next 15 years will bring to Wolf Mountain!



2021: Nature trails, programs & public education about wild canids



pre-Covid photo



Wishes and Wants: As a non-profit we rely heavily on donations. Below are some of the many items that would help the center. If you can help, please contact us or simply bring the item(s) on your next visit!

Animal Care

Metal rakes/shovels
Metal "pooper-scoopers"
Walleye scoop net
Old fire hoses
6' round/oval galvanized water troughs
No-climb horse fence (4' or 6' height)
Commercial grade garden hose (3/4")

Landscaping/Maintenance

Picnic tables & benches
Solar lights (for pathways)
Wheelbarrow (heavy duty)
Solar-operated fountain
Carabiners (2-3" size)
Exterior screws (2.5-3" size)
Lag construction screws (3-4" size)
Working push mower

Office/Classroom

Postage stamps
AA batteries
Brown paper lunch bags
30 or 55-gallon garbage bags

Can you help? Many of these jobs are "one & done" tasks that can be completed in a single day!

Skills/Services

(we provide the materials-you provide the service!)

Roto-tilling a garden area approx. 20 x 20' (bring your rototiller)
Spreading of mulch on walkways/garden beds
Planting of small flowers/veggies
Construction of wooden fence using 2 x 4's

Open Hours and Admission Rates

*Last admission is 30 minutes prior to closing time.

	Sundays	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fridays	Saturdays
Regular Season September 1 – June 30 (closed in January)	Open 12 – 4 pm Various animal enrichment programs; Self or Guided Tours at 12:30 and 2:00 pm	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Summer Season July 1 – August 31	Open 12 – 4 pm Various animal enrichment programs; Self or Guided Tours at 12:30 and 2:00 pm	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Open 12 – 3 pm Various animal enrichment programs; Self-Guided Tours	Open 12 – 3 pm Various animal enrichment programs; Self-Guided Tours
Admission	Children 5 & under Free Folks 6 & up \$8.00	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Children 5 & under Free Folks 6 & up \$8.00	Children 5 & under Free Folks 6 & up \$8.00

2021 Special Programs

Wolf Communication Program (Howl Night)

Learn the variety of methods used by wolves to communicate including scent marking, body language, and vocalizations. Understand why wolves howl and the distinct types of messages behind each howl. We finish with a pack howl!

May 29 6pm – dark
June 26 7pm – dark
July 10 7pm – dark
July 24 7pm – dark
August 7 7pm – dark
August 21 7pm – dark
September 18 5pm – dark
October 16 4pm – dark

All Howl Programs are held on Saturday evenings and include tours of all wolf & coyote exhibits.

(Please note that our Arctic Fox exhibits are closed during this program.) This is a group tour/lecture—visitors are expected to remain with the group at all times.

Admission is \$8.00 per person
(5 and under are free)

Please Note:

Due to Covid-19 and ever-changing mandates & regulations, any or all of our planned events/activities may be abruptly cancelled or postponed. We apologize in advance if this happens, but it is out of our control. Certainly, we will abide by rules passed down and want everyone to stay as safe as possible. If you have pre-paid for an activity that is cancelled due to federal or local mandates, we will offer you one of the following options: refund, credit toward a future event, credit toward merchandise at our gift shop, or accept your money as a donation to be used for animal care expenses.

We appreciate your understanding.

Camping with the Wolves (requires pre-registration) \$75 fee per person

Bring your tent and be a part of our overnight experience while camping with the wolves nearby! Price includes dinner, snacks, light breakfast, guided tour, nature hike, howl program, and feeding of the animals. Participants must be at least 12 years old; register via website.



Wolves & Watermelons July 25, 2021

How do wolves beat the heat? With crushed ice & watermelon treats! Join us for this fun enrichment activity!

