



Field Notes

Wolves

by Cheryl Lord
Photos ©Cheryl Lord



Throughout history wolves have gotten quite a bad rap for being evil, villainous creatures loathed and feared by all mankind. The truth of the matter is while wolves should be respected, as all wild creatures should be, this misconception couldn't be further from the truth. Most healthy wolves would just as soon avoid any contact with man, and there are very few documented fatal human/wolf encounters in the United States.

Wolves are actually very social creatures that live within a strictly regulated pack, led by the alpha male and female, who normally mate for life. The whole pack helps raise any pups, taking turns playing with, nurturing, feeding and guarding them as adults rotate hunting duties.

Wolves are considered apex, top of the food chain predators and are key factors in the maintenance of the ecosystems they inhabit. For example, when wolves were reintroduced in Yellowstone National Park after being absent for decades, over time certain species such as beavers (nearly extinct within the park) starting flourishing once again. Wolves typically hunt sick, weak prey (moose, elk and deer) helping keep these populations in check and ensure strong genes pass to future generations of the herd. Without wolves as predators



in the Yellowstone region, populations of prey species such as elk grew and decimated plants beavers relied upon for survival decreasing beaver populations significantly.

As wolf populations increased upon reintroduction, elk were forced once again to be on the move in order to survive, which means they no longer could stay in one region and graze long enough to be detrimental to the native plants in that spot. Once this phenomenon occurred, beaver populations grew due to the ample plants available—which also helped boost populations of fish in the rivers now shaded by the plants as well as provide shelter for many songbirds previously absent in various regions.

Recently delisted from the endangered species list due to pressure from ranchers and residents in the western states, these beautiful creatures are vulnerable once again. Wolves are a necessary part of our ecosystem and have an intrinsic right to exist and thrive in their natural environments.

Want to know more about wolves? You can meet them up close and personal while talking to our friends at the Lakota Wolf Preserve in Columbia, New Jersey as they dedicate their lives to educating about and caring for these majestic animals. Visit: www.lakotawolf.com/ to learn more.

