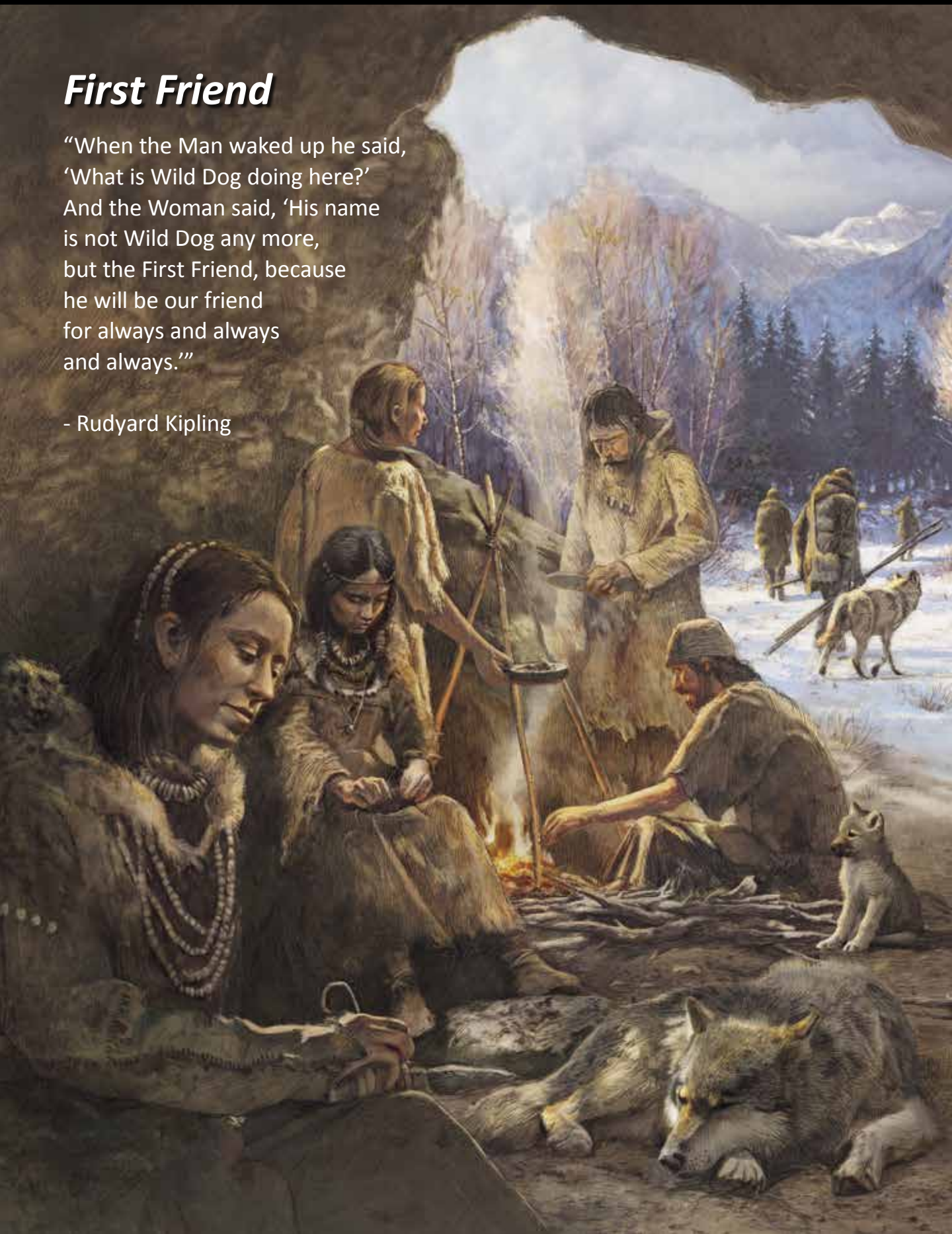

Living with Wolves
Photographic Exhibit

The Enduring Bond

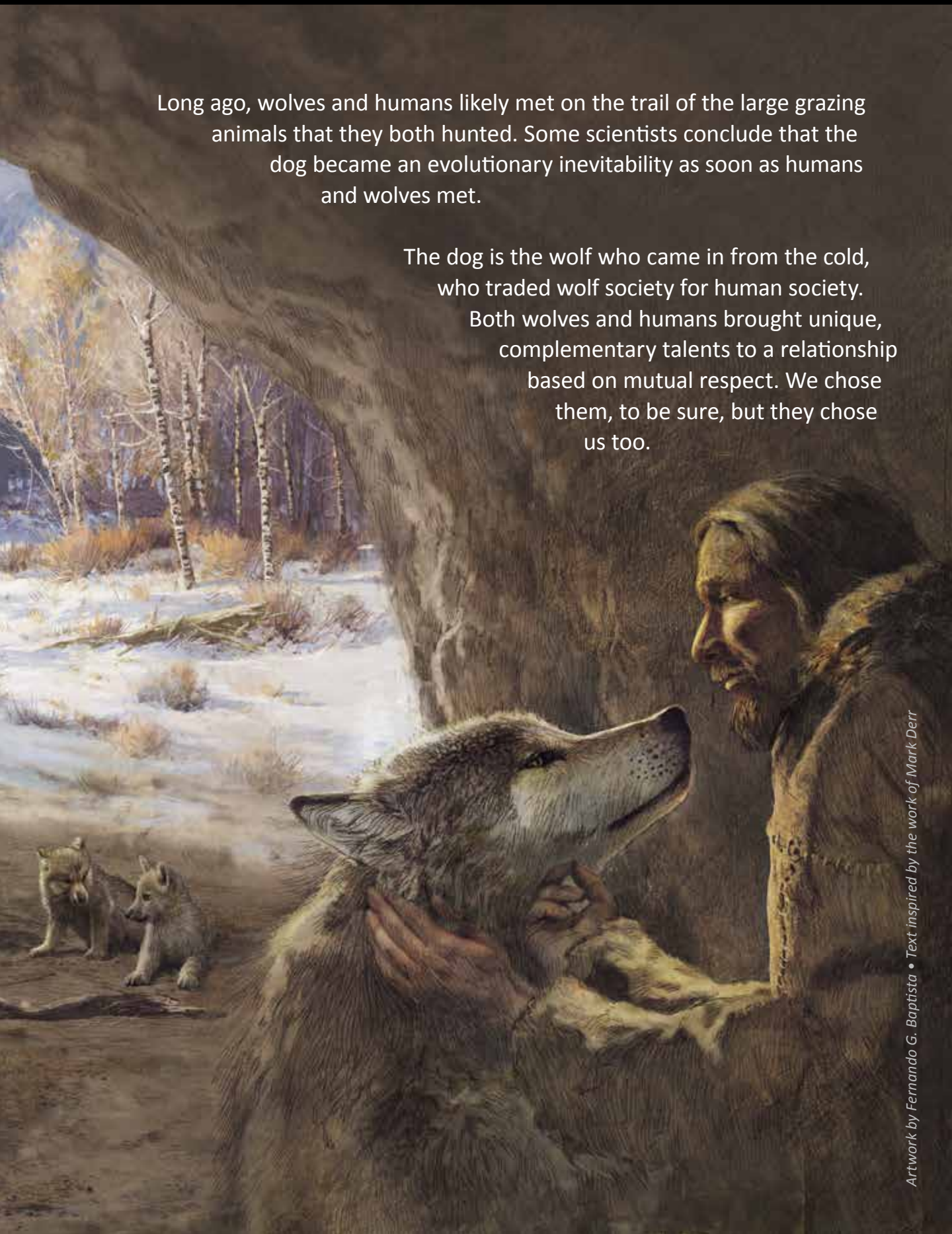


First Friend

"When the Man waked up he said,
'What is Wild Dog doing here?'
And the Woman said, 'His name
is not Wild Dog any more,
but the First Friend, because
he will be our friend
for always and always
and always.'"

- Rudyard Kipling

Humans didn't teach dogs to be loyal, loving, or protective. These are traits the wolf passed on to the dog.



Long ago, wolves and humans likely met on the trail of the large grazing animals that they both hunted. Some scientists conclude that the dog became an evolutionary inevitability as soon as humans and wolves met.

The dog is the wolf who came in from the cold, who traded wolf society for human society. Both wolves and humans brought unique, complementary talents to a relationship based on mutual respect. We chose them, to be sure, but they chose us too.

Artwork by Fernando G. Baptista • Text inspired by the work of Mark Derr

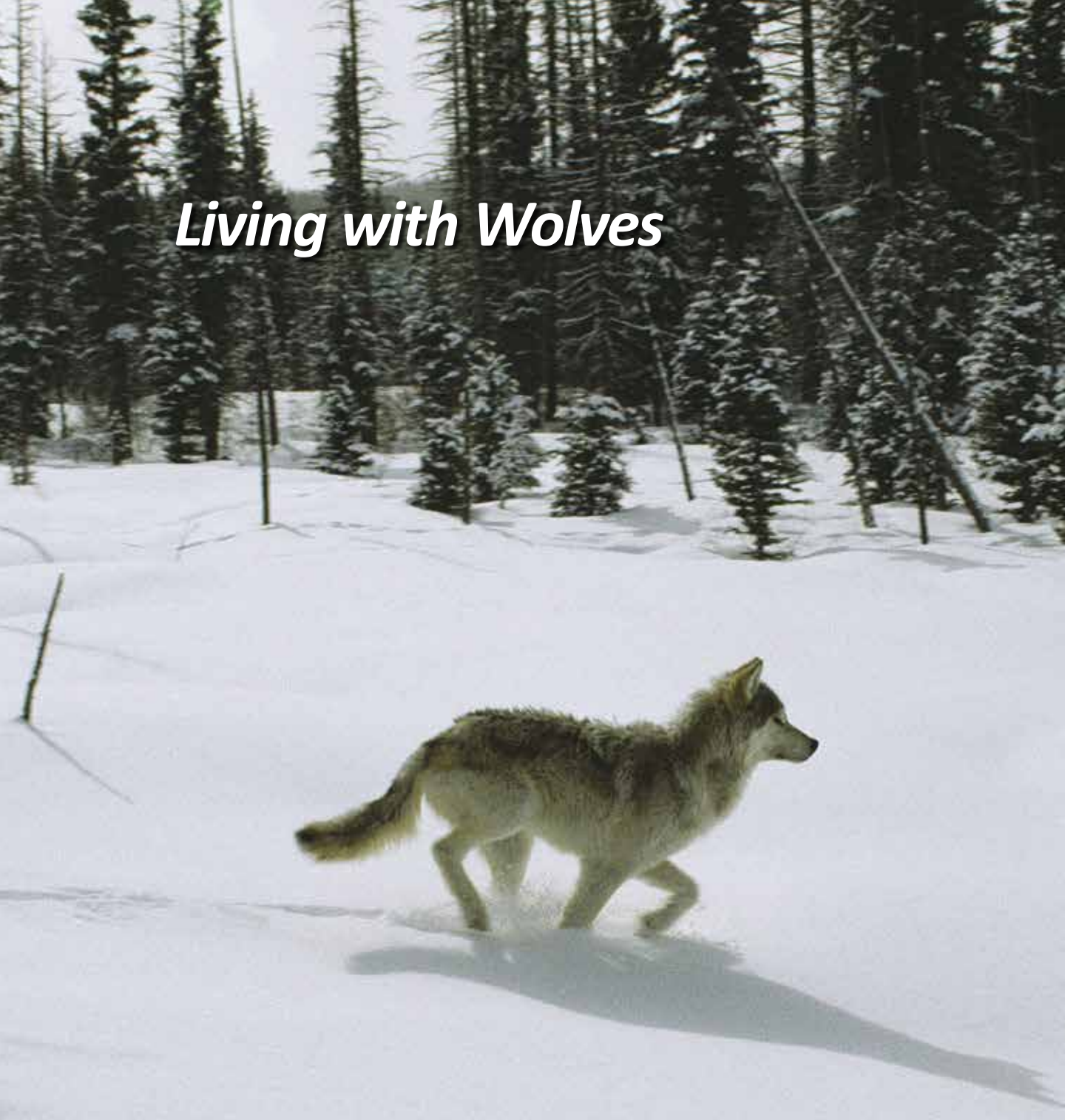
The Wolf

Wolves have always stirred the human imagination. For some, they are creatures of nightmare – their mere existence triggering irrational fear and even hatred. For others, wolves hold a special place as inspiring symbols of all things wild.

Big Bad Wolf?

Long ago, early humans and wolves coexisted and, it is thought, even hunted together. However, when humans domesticated livestock and became pastoral, a division was born. Hatred and fear were spun into fairy tales and folklore that turned the wolf into a sinister man-eater. This largely fictitious wolf still resides deep in the human psyche and continues to play a role in literature and films today.

Living with Wolves



For eons, wolves thrived throughout North America. Pioneers traveling westward in the 19th century wrote in their journals about the howl of the wolf and a land rich with wildlife.

However, in those days progress meant taming the land and eliminating predators. Wolves became the target of an especially brutal and aggressive extermination campaign. By 1960 wolves were annihilated in the lower 48 states, except for a small population in the upper Great Lakes region.

Times have changed, and many have come to realize the eradication of wolves and other predators was misguided. Efforts to re-establish a wolf population in the American West began in January 1995 when 29 wolves, relocated from Canada, were released in Yellowstone National Park and Central Idaho. Thirty-seven additional wolves were released in 1996. Over time they began to recover in Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, and other western states.

Nevertheless, there are still those who seek to undermine wolf recovery. Educational outreach is a cornerstone of our mission at Living with Wolves. Our goal is to shed light on the true nature of wolves, their behavior and biology, while dispelling the myths and misinformation. This exhibit offers you a window into the complex world of this misunderstood animal.

The Hidden Life of Wolves

Seeing wolves at all is a rare enough occurrence; to see them play and demonstrate their care for one another, their social structure, and their private family life requires special conditions. In the shadow of the Sawtooth Mountains, we camped for six years with a wolf pack. Filming them, listening to them, and gaining their trust allowed us to share their story.

Crossing the Species Barrier

Austrian ethologist Konrad Lorenz once wrote, “The quickest way to learn the language of a species is to do so as a social partner.” By living with a wolf pack from the time they were pups, Jim and Jamie Dutcher were able to gain the wolves’ trust. By making themselves part of the wolves’ environment, they were able to unobtrusively observe their behavior in a way that few people ever have.

Portrait of a Pack

A wolf pack is a complex social unit, an extended family of parents, siblings, aunts, and uncles. Unrelated wolves may join after dispersing from another pack. The bond a wolf has with its pack is very much like the bond people have with their own families. Like elephants, gorillas, whales, and humans, wolves are among the most social animals on the planet.

The Lone Wolf

A lone wolf is usually a temporary situation. A wolf may disperse from his or her pack, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles before joining another pack or finding a mate to start a new pack. Coming from a different lineage, dispersers help to keep packs genetically healthy. Because wolves depend on their families for companionship and survival, a wolf would not choose to live alone permanently.

Perceptions of Wolves

The Wolf of Nightmares

Europeans brought an ancient fear of wolves with them to the New World. Tales like Little Red Riding Hood shaped our impression of a savage, crafty and deceitful creature. The belief that wolves pose a serious threat to people still persists today, even though nearly all evidence is to the contrary. While we know that the wolf is far different than the animal of folklore, this fear-based perception is very much alive in many people's imaginations.

The Spirit Wolf

Born in the culture of Native American tribes, this wolf is an animal of great wisdom, revered as a spiritual guide. More symbol than animal, this perception emphasizes the wolf's most noble qualities and it has been borrowed and often unintentionally distorted by many passionate modern-day wolf enthusiasts.

Throughout history and across cultures, people have developed very different perceptions of the wolf that often exist side by side.

The Wolf of Science

Wolves are challenging to study because they are wary, intelligent and elusive. Until recently, this wolf was largely depicted through data and statistics of reproduction, predation, physiology and distribution. As less invasive research techniques are being developed, some biologists have begun to dig deeper and are now beginning to look at the highly social nature of this animal.

The Social Wolf

Wolves are intensely social creatures. They express themselves through a rich array of vocal communication and body language. Wolves, like our dogs, are emotional animals. They are extremely devoted to their pack, their family, caring for each other as individuals, each with its own distinct personality. They nurture their sick and injured, protect their family and guard their territory. To be a wolf is to be part of something bigger than itself – its family, the pack. The more we learn about them, the more we learn about ourselves and other social animals.

The Alpha Pair

The alphas, or breeding pair, are essentially the parents of a wolf pack and usually the only ones to mate. They generally lead the pack and maintain the social order. Often they are the most vigilant and first to respond to potential threats to their family. If there is an abundance of prey, they may allow others in the pack to breed. In difficult times it is possible for no breeding to occur.

Wolf Pups

Wolf pups are born helpless with eyes closed. A den, dug by their mother, provides shelter and a secure place for them to begin their lives. The pups will spend the first six weeks in or near the den, nursed and cared for by their mother. Pups are born only in spring as the snow melts. This allows them time to grow, learn, and mature during summer and autumn before facing the challenges of winter.

Wolves at our Door

We called it Wolf Camp. The project began as a way to reveal the hidden life of an animal that was so scarce and elusive that it was virtually unknown. Over time, we effectively created a small enclosure for humans within a vast territory for wolves. Not only did this safeguard our gear from curious wolves, but it also allowed the pack to open their lives to us, accepting us as just another part of their world.

The Omega Wolf

The lowest-ranking wolf in a pack is called an omega. An omega typically submits to his or her fellow pack members and is often treated as a scapegoat. In our study, we observed that the omegas instigated play, helping to alleviate social tension, and thereby served a very important role within the pack.

Untangling the Myths

Do wolves attack people?

Wolves are a top predator, but wolves are also afraid of people. In rare cases, when wolves are drawn close to people, attracted to a food source such as an exposed garbage dump, their natural fear of humans can erode. Since 1900, there have been only two possible cases of a wolf-related human fatality in North America, and there have been no cases in the lower 48 states.

Are wolves killing all the elk and deer?

Wolves have always coexisted with their prey. Since wolves were brought back, the American West is actually home to more elk than before. Many factors can cause ungulate populations to fluctuate. Severe winters, drought, and urban sprawl are all very hard on elk and deer. Like most predators around the world, wolves typically select vulnerable prey animals, which helps to keep herds healthy and strong.

Do wolves kill for sport?

Wolves kill prey in order to feed themselves, not for sport. Hunting is dangerous for wolves. Their prey is typically much larger than they are, with formidable hooves and sharp antlers or horns, enabling prey animals to kill a wolf in self-defense.

Wolves are wary and very alert creatures. They will temporarily leave their kill when approached by people or other predators. If left undisturbed, wolves will eventually eat all of what they kill. They return to their food source repeatedly, especially in winter when food caches are critical for survival. When wolves are not feeding on their kill, scavenging animals from eagles to bears to coyotes may benefit from the carcass.

Are the reintroduced wolves bigger and different?

The wolves that were reintroduced from Canada into Yellowstone National Park and Central Idaho in 1995 are the same species of wolf that historically lived in the Northern Rockies. Wolves constantly cross the U.S.-Canadian border in either direction, sometimes traveling great distances before finding a mate. Wolves travel and wolves mix. The average mature gray wolf in the Rocky Mountains weighs 85 to 115 pounds.

Field Notes on the Gray Wolf

by National Geographic senior artist Fernando Gomez-Baptista

In the Shadow of the Sawtooths

The wolf project was ambitious, requiring year-round living and constant filming. The site was remote yet accessible and provided stimulating and varied terrain for the wolves. As the pack matured, the wolves were free to build their own society, choose their own leaders, and sort out their own disputes, while we were able to witness their social behavior up close.

Wolves at Play

Play is vital to every stage of a wolf's life, allowing wolves to release pent-up energy, hone their physical skills, and reinforce social bonds and status. Perhaps more than other behavior, play is how wolves demonstrate excitement, affection, empathy, humor, and many other social attributes that we as humans recognize.

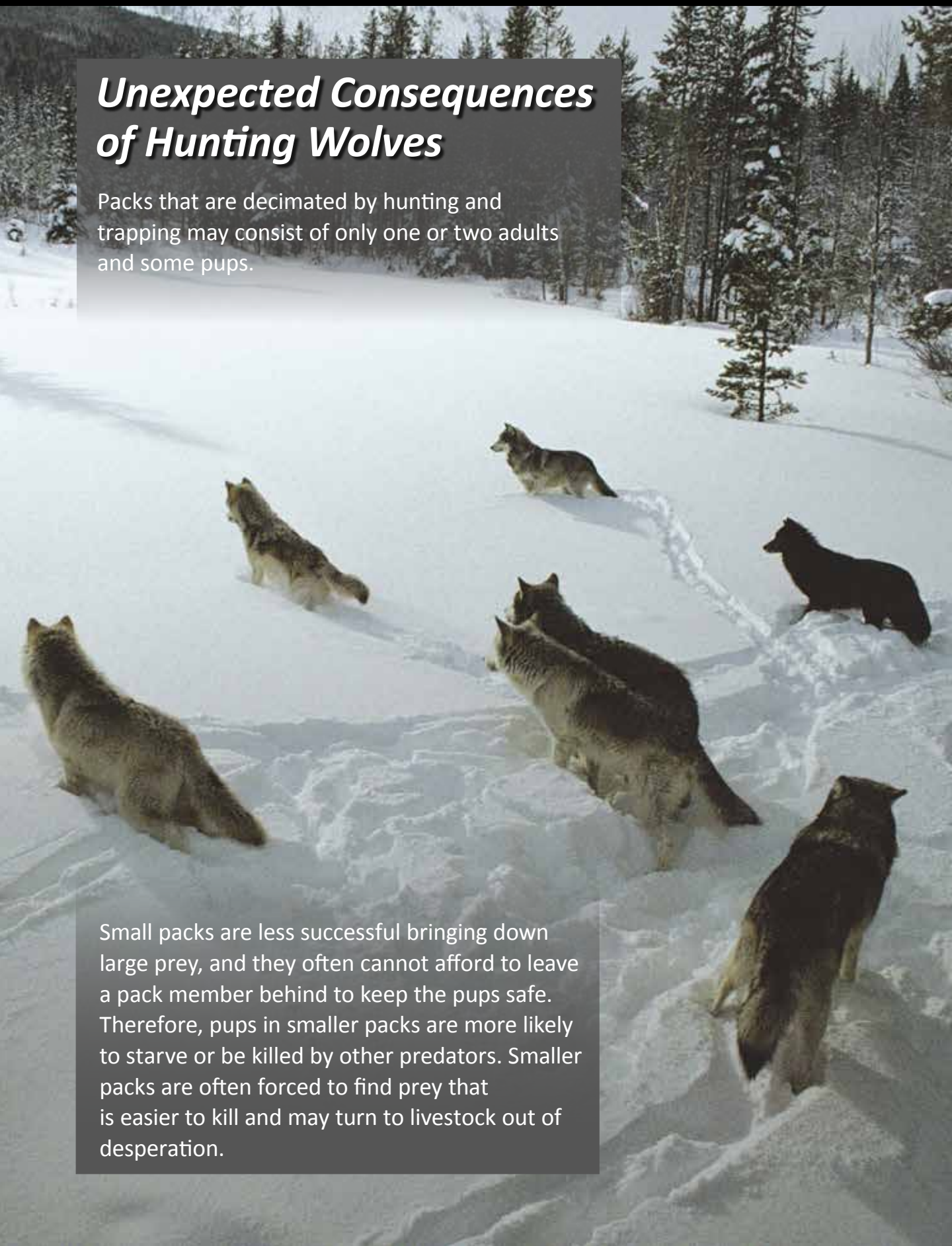
Cooperation

Cooperation is a trait that all highly social animals have in common. Many early human cultures revered wolves and their cooperative hunting technique. Wolves lack the brute strength of a grizzly bear or the gripping claws of a mountain lion. It is very difficult for a 90-pound wolf to bring down a 600-pound elk, but with communication and cooperation wolves make up for their limitations through well-orchestrated teamwork.

Defending a Kill

Although it varies based on the prey animal, wolves fail on the hunt about 85% of the time. When they are successful in bringing down prey, other predators may soon appear. Wolves will often give up their meal to a more powerful predator like a grizzly bear. To drive away other animals, wolves communicate warning by snarling, growling, or launching themselves at the interloper. Not surprisingly, a large pack is better able to defend a kill.

Breaking up Packs

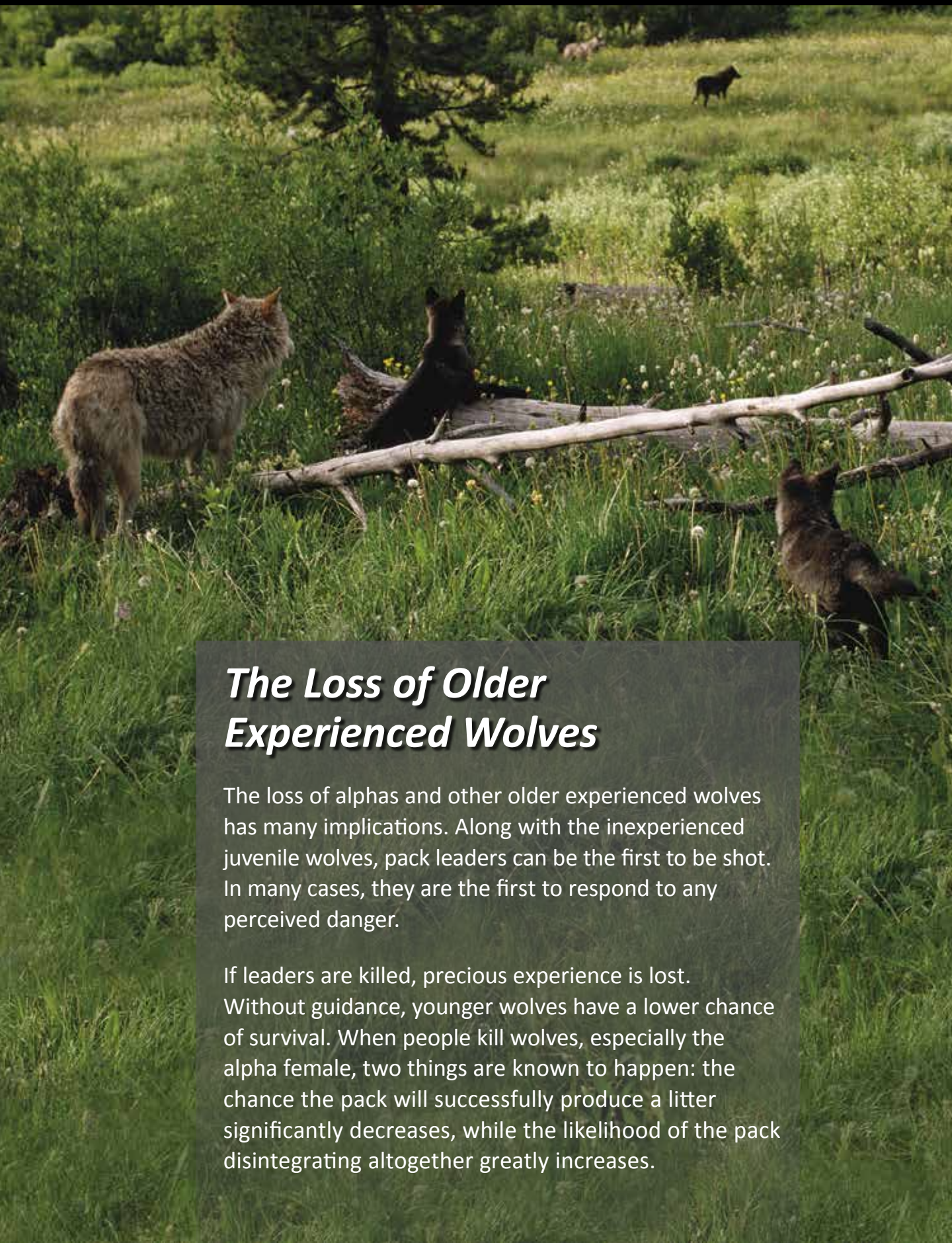


Unexpected Consequences of Hunting Wolves

Packs that are decimated by hunting and trapping may consist of only one or two adults and some pups.

Small packs are less successful bringing down large prey, and they often cannot afford to leave a pack member behind to keep the pups safe. Therefore, pups in smaller packs are more likely to starve or be killed by other predators. Smaller packs are often forced to find prey that is easier to kill and may turn to livestock out of desperation.

When people hunt and trap wolves, packs can fall apart completely or be broken up into smaller, less functional groups.



The Loss of Older Experienced Wolves

The loss of alphas and other older experienced wolves has many implications. Along with the inexperienced juvenile wolves, pack leaders can be the first to be shot. In many cases, they are the first to respond to any perceived danger.

If leaders are killed, precious experience is lost. Without guidance, younger wolves have a lower chance of survival. When people kill wolves, especially the alpha female, two things are known to happen: the chance the pack will successfully produce a litter significantly decreases, while the likelihood of the pack disintegrating altogether greatly increases.

Learning from the Adults

Young wolves watch and often mimic the behavior of the adults. This helps them as they learn to hunt and develop other skills vital to survival. During the hunt, pups observe how their elders locate prey and alter the hunting strategy to ensure the best chance of success. This type of acquired experience and knowledge is passed on to future generations.

Growing up Wolf

Pups are naturally curious, bold, and playful. These are important qualities as they start to explore the world and form relationships within their pack. Young wolves establish an early puppy hierarchy amongst themselves, with certain individuals emerging as dominant. As the pups mature, they integrate into the adult hierarchy.

Ranching in Wolf Country

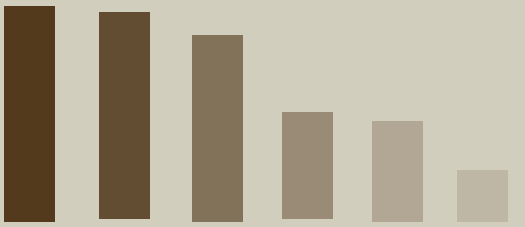
Counting sheep loss

Wherever wolves live, their impact on the livestock industry is minimal. However, in areas where public rangeland overlaps with wild predator habitat, attacks by predators can present challenges to individual livestock producers.

Only a small fraction of sheep deaths reported by ranchers are attributed to wolves.

REPORTED SHEEP LOSSES FROM ALL CAUSES: 220,004

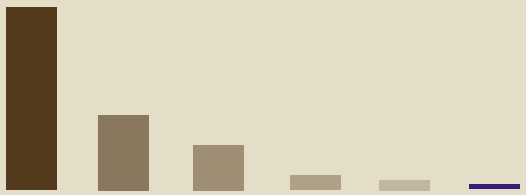
NON-PREDATOR CAUSES



- 17.7% Diseases and disorders 38,864
- 17.5% Old age 38,440
- 15.3% Found dead and Unknown 33,673
- 8.7% Lambing problems 19,199
- 8.4% Other 18,511
- 4.4% Weather 9,603

TOTAL: 158,290 NON-PREDATOR (71.9%)

PREDATOR CAUSES



- 15.2% Coyotes 33,498
- 6% Dogs 13,223
- 3.5% Other predators (bobcats, lynx, vultures, foxes, ravens, feral pigs, eagles, other or unknown) 7,613
- 1.6% Cougars 3,460
- 1.4% Bears 3,090
- .4% Wolves 830

TOTAL: 61,714 PREDATOR (28.1%)

(Percentages exceed 100 because of rounding) Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Services. 2014 statistics.

Livestock face many dangers on public lands, including severe weather, disease, birthing complications, injuries, and to a lesser extent, attacks by coyotes, eagles, bears, cougars, and wolves.

There are many ways to prevent conflicts between wild predators and domestic livestock. Many proactive ranchers are implementing the following techniques successfully:

- The presence of people has always been an effective way to keep wolves and other predators away. Today, “range riders” can keep watch over livestock and monitor the movements of predators like wolves and bears.
- In many cases a wolf pack will use the same den every spring. If they know the location of a den, ranchers can avoid grazing livestock in these areas.
- Livestock on the open range die from many natural causes. The smell of a dead animal attracts carnivores. When possible, removing dead livestock from the vicinity of the healthy herd greatly reduces the likelihood of encounters with predators.
- Temporary corrals with electrified fencing and strings of fluttering red flags, called turbo-fladry can be used for “night-penning.”
- Guard dogs and herders on night patrol can provide added protection through the night.

Modifying certain ranching practices will, in turn, alter certain predator behavior.

Photos by Matt Moyer

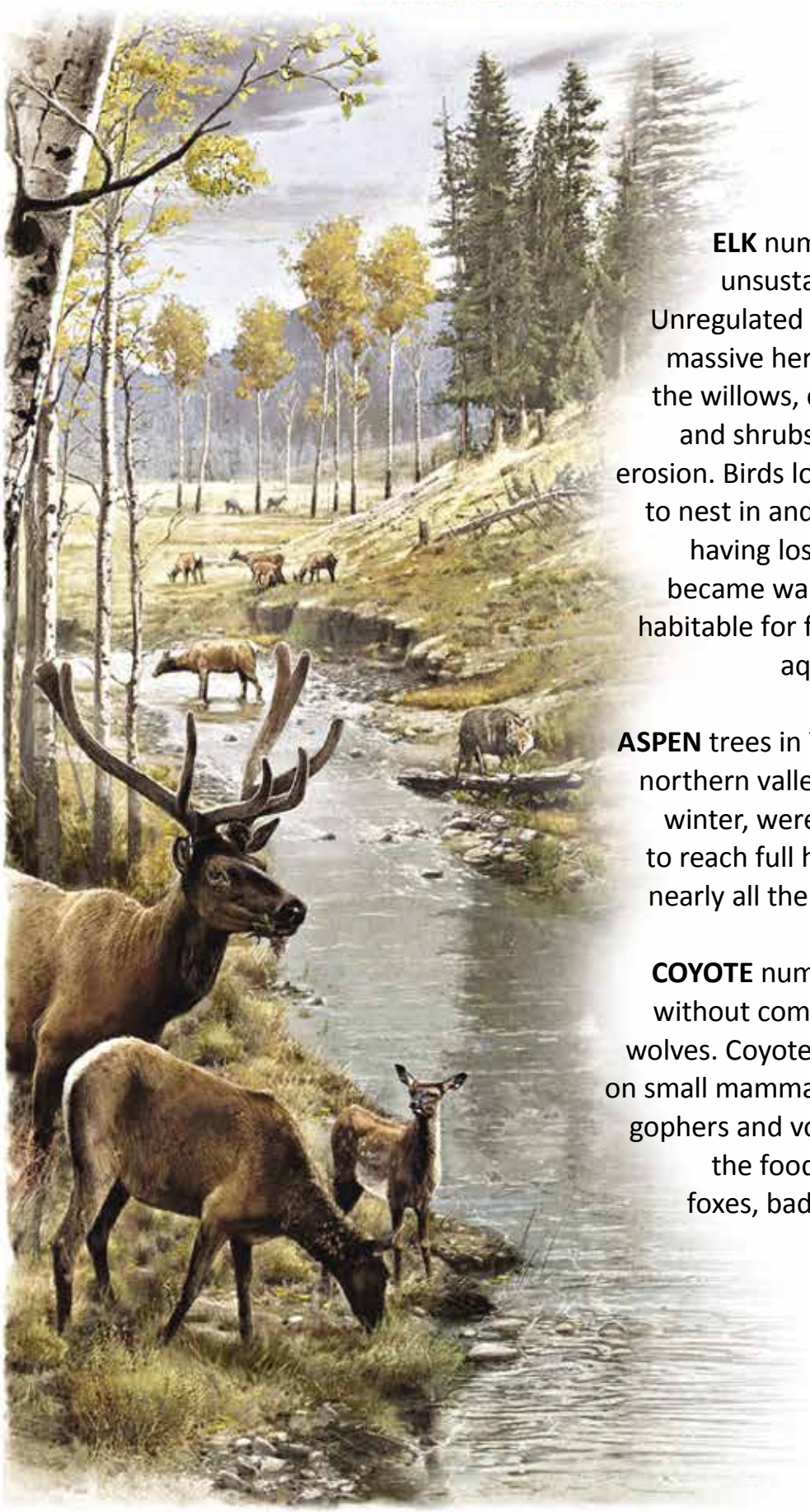
The Language of Wolves

Wolves howl for more reasons than we will ever know. Howling can be a celebration of pack solidarity, a declaration of territory to other wolves, a simple response to a far-off sound, or even just an expression of joy. When one wolf in a pack begins to howl, usually other members join in, as if on cue, creating a chorus that swells to a soulful frenzy. Wolves also have an extensive repertoire of other vocalizations like growls, barks, whines, yips, and whimpers.

Ancient Connections

All domestic dogs are direct descendants of wolves that lived tens of thousands of years ago. The DNA of a dog is nearly identical to that of a wolf. Therefore, it is no surprise that, in many ways, their behavior is also similar. Wolves and dogs are creatures that need, above all, to have a social bond - wolves with other wolves and dogs with their human companions.

YELLOWSTONE WITHOUT WOLVES 1926 – 1995



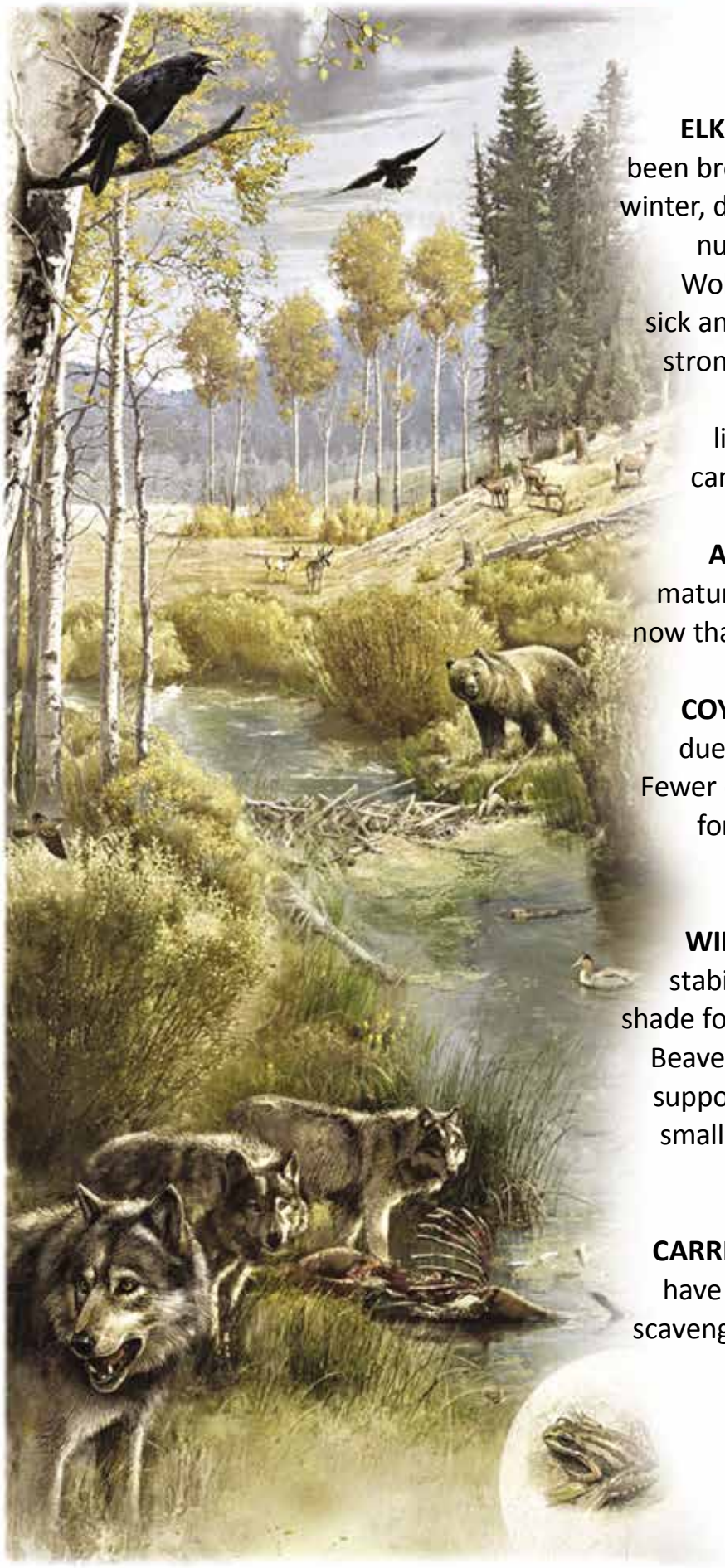
ELK numbers grew to unsustainable levels. Unregulated by predators, massive herds consumed the willows, cottonwoods, and shrubs that prevent erosion. Birds lost vegetation to nest in and the streams, having lost their shade, became warmer and less habitable for fish and other aquatic species.

ASPEN trees in Yellowstone's northern valleys, where elk winter, were seldom able to reach full height. Elk ate nearly all the new sprouts.

COYOTE numbers climbed without competition from wolves. Coyotes prey mainly on small mammals like pocket gophers and voles, reducing the food available for foxes, badgers, weasels and raptors.

ART BY FERNANDO G. BAPTISTA, NGS STAFF, AMANDA HOBBS, NG STAFF SOURCES: ROBERT L. BESCHTA AND WILLIAM J. RIPPLE, OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY, DOUGLAS W. SMITH, YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

YELLOWSTONE WITH WOLVES 1995 – PRESENT



ELK are fewer in number, having been brought into balance by severe winter, drought, wolves, and growing numbers of cougars and bears. Wolves single out the weak, old, sick and young animals, leaving the strongest elk to reproduce. A fear of predators keeps elk from lingering by streams, where it can be harder to escape attack.

ASPEN trees are able to reach maturity and grow in thick groves, now that elk eat fewer new sprouts.

COYOTE numbers have dropped due to competition with wolves. Fewer coyotes means more rodents for foxes, badgers, weasels and raptors.

WILLOWS and cottonwoods are stabilizing stream banks, creating shade for birds and food for beavers. Beavers create dams and wetlands supporting fish, amphibians, birds, small mammals, and more insects to feed them.

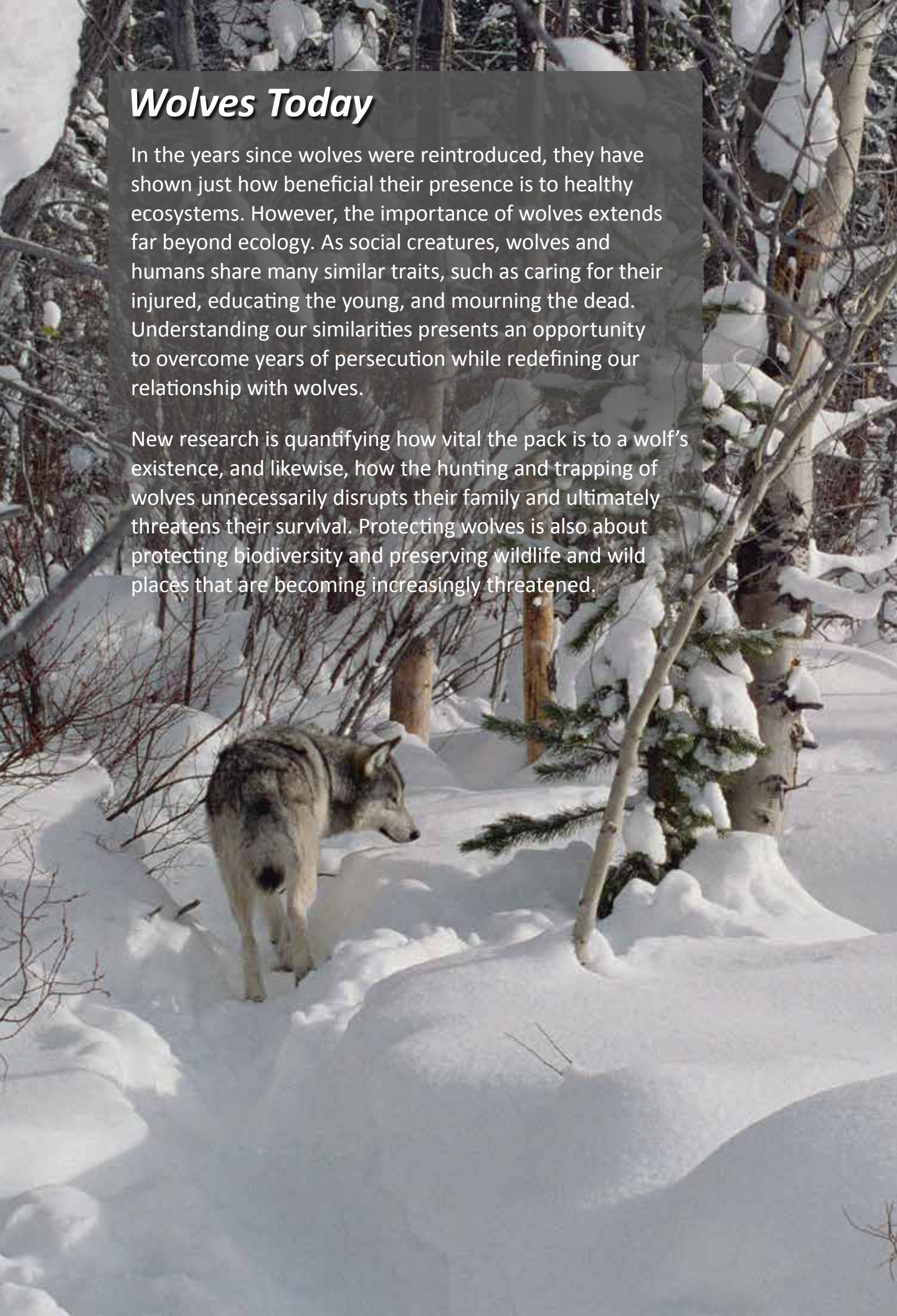
CARRION, the animals that wolves have killed, also provides food for scavengers, notably eagles, coyotes, ravens, magpies and bears.

Affection

Within a pack, rarely do two wolves pass each other without rubbing shoulders or exchanging a brief lick. Often two wolves will lie together, curled up beside each other, the head of one draped over the neck of the other in a gesture that can be both assertive and affectionate.

Economic Benefits of Reintroduction

In addition to ecological benefits, the return of the wolf has also sparked economic benefits. Since wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park, it has become the best place in the world to see them. The park draws hundreds of thousands of visitors each year in search of wolves. Wolf tourism contributes over $82 million annually to the regional economy.



Wolves Today

In the years since wolves were reintroduced, they have shown just how beneficial their presence is to healthy ecosystems. However, the importance of wolves extends far beyond ecology. As social creatures, wolves and humans share many similar traits, such as caring for their injured, educating the young, and mourning the dead. Understanding our similarities presents an opportunity to overcome years of persecution while redefining our relationship with wolves.

New research is quantifying how vital the pack is to a wolf's existence, and likewise, how the hunting and trapping of wolves unnecessarily disrupts their family and ultimately threatens their survival. Protecting wolves is also about protecting biodiversity and preserving wildlife and wild places that are becoming increasingly threatened.

The Sawtooth Pack

On the edge of Idaho's Sawtooth Wilderness, we built the world's largest wolf enclosure, where multiple generations of wolves grew to trust and accept us as just another part of their world.

Not wanting to habituate a wild pack of wolves to our cameras, we began our project with pups, whose parents had been rescued captive wolves.

To document their family life, we spent six years living in a tented camp within their vast wild territory, filming and studying the wolves we called the Sawtooth Pack. By capturing their intimate lives on film, we were able to dispel myths and show a side of wolves that is often overlooked.

Jim and Jamie Dutcher, Founders of Living with Wolves

Step into the world of the wolf. This booklet is a print edition of our museum exhibit now on permanent display in Ketchum, Idaho. Produced in conjunction with National Geographic, the exhibit's interpretive panels explore wolf behavior and biology, dispel myths, and examine wide-ranging perceptions surrounding wolves.

Living with Wolves, a national nonprofit organization, is dedicated to engaging the public worldwide in education, outreach, and research to promote truth and understanding about wolves, while encouraging coexistence and inspiring people to take action to protect them. To learn more about what you can do for wolves, visit our website.

Living with Wolves

A 501c3 nonprofit organization

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