

# Wild Kids

## Homecomings Mean Big Changes in Yellowstone

### Wolves Mean More Willows, and More Willows Mean More Wildlife!

by Kirsten Galloway

**D**o you know what wolves and willows have in common? In Yellowstone National Park, some scientists think that wolves and willows are the reason more animal species are returning to America's oldest national park after years of being gone.

In 1995, wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone. Since then, biologists and wolf watchers have noticed some big changes. Before the wolves returned, giant elk hung out in the low-lying streambeds, munching away on tasty willow plants. But now the elk are heading to the rockier hillside, leaving the willows for other species, like beavers and birds. This may be because the elk are anxious to be unobserved by the watchful eyes of the hunting wolf. Or it could be because of other changing factors like less snow, which allows elk to frequent the slopes.


Willows make a good meal for beavers, which build their dams close by. The dams create pools of water that serve as habitat for otters, muskrats and bird species. Willows are also wonderful places for birds like yellow warblers and willow flycatchers to nest.

While there is still much unknown about the results of reintroduction of wolves to the area, the impact on wildlife may be very positive. Scientists continue to watch carefully the changes taking place and hope to see balance returned to this beautiful wildlife setting.

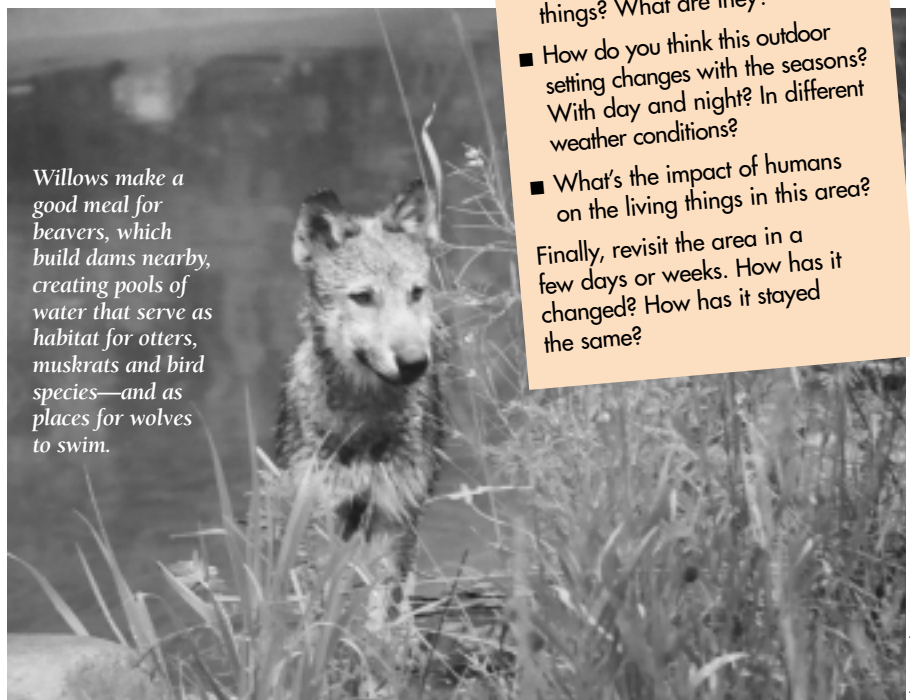
You can read more about the reintroduction of wolves in Yellowstone and the amazing impact it has had on the ecosystem at <http://www.nps.gov/yell/nature/animals/wolf/wolfrest.html>. ■

*Kirsten Galloway writes articles and short stories for kids and grown-ups from her home in Corcoran, Minnesota.*

#### Source:

-  Nicholas Thompson, "Wolves' Return Restores Balance to Yellowstone National Park," *Duluth News Tribune*, 5 October 2003.

*Willows make a good meal for beavers, which build dams nearby, creating pools of water that serve as habitat for otters, muskrats and bird species—and as places for wolves to swim.*



Sherry Jokinen

### Field Journal Activity

An ecosystem is a community of animals and plants interacting with one another and their physical environment. Yellowstone National Park is an incredible example of an ecosystem that has been brought into better balance because of wolves being returned to the area. This can be called "ecological restoration."

Here's an activity that will give you a chance to observe an ecosystem of your own.

First, choose a place you can observe. It can be your backyard, a park, a schoolyard or any outdoor setting.

Next, record what you see with words or pictures. Here are some questions to get you started:

- What's living? What makes something a living thing?
- What do the living things need to stay alive?
- Are there threats to the living things? What are they?
- How do you think this outdoor setting changes with the seasons? With day and night? In different weather conditions?
- What's the impact of humans on the living things in this area?

Finally, revisit the area in a few days or weeks. How has it changed? How has it stayed the same?