



Tracking the Pack

Pups Learn Their Place in Exhibit Pack: Assortment of Subspecies Provides Unique Mix

by Lori Schmidt,
Wolf Curator, International Wolf Center

The International Wolf Center manages an Exhibit Pack of six wolves that represent three different generations with three different subspecies. The oldest wolves in our Exhibit are Shadow and Malik, *Canis lupus arctos* or arctic subspecies, born in May 2000. The next generation features Grizzer and Maya, *Canis lupus nubilus* or Great Plains subspecies, born in May 2004. Born in April 2008, Aidan and Denali represent *Canis lupus occidentalis*, also known as the northwestern or Rocky Mountain wolf. Aidan and Denali had a successful introduction, and weighed over 100 pounds at one year of age.

Management of non-related litters that are socialized and introduced to an existing pack of adult wolves is quite different from what would occur in the wild. Typically, a wild pack consists of parents and their offspring with the pack members growing up in the pack hierarchy and respecting their

parents as the dominant pack members. In the Center's Exhibit Pack, there are more frequent ritualized dominance displays to maintain social rank order. Social behavior is still strong, but there is a tendency to see more gender-specific behavior to maintain status within the ranks. This behavior is interpreted weekly in the wolf logs, YouTube videos and podcasts posted at www.wolf.org.

If you have been following the Center's logs, you may have noticed that we are

managing one female, Maya, in the Exhibit Pack. Maya's behavior became very intense after the introduction of the northwestern subspecies pups in August 2008. In the absence of another female in the pack, Maya became fixated on Aidan and began stalking and dominating him intensively. This behavior began in late fall, peaked during February and March, then calmed in the spring. In captive wolf management, we observe far more intensity between females than males. This may be due to the role of the female wolf in regulating litters as an intrinsic population control in the wild.

Since the Exhibit Pack contains three subspecies that would rarely be found in the same geographic range in the wild, there is no breeding at the Center in order to

prevent creating a cross between subspecies. All wolves are spayed or neutered prior to one year of age. While there is some debate about the impact of spaying and neutering, our experience has shown that the ritualized dominance occurring within the pack is calmed by this management process. However, as Aidan experienced in the winter of 2008-2009, this behavior is not eliminated.

As the pups became yearlings, they were clearly conditioned to be submissive based on the behaviors of strong adult pack members, but as they reach maturity by two years of age, they will likely move up in the pack. To follow the rank order of the pack, check out the weblogs, YouTube and podcasts for more detailed analyses of life in the Exhibit Pack. ■

The International Wolf Center's Exhibit Pack of wolves is regularly on display at the center and on www.wolf.org.



International Wolf Center