



Tracking the Pack

The Maturation of Another Litter

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The International Wolf Center has raised litters of pups since the first temporary exhibit in 1989. During the winter of 2009-10, the Exhibit Pack showed behaviors that coincide with maturing wolves. Denali and Aidan, born April 27, 2008, reached full adult size around eight months of age, but they did not reach behavioral maturity until 18 to 24

months. One word describes behavioral maturity of a wolf—testing.

Wolf-care staff began noticing more intense behavioral interactions in September 2009. Instead of standing by and watching the adult wolves in chase behavior, Aidan and Denali began joining the chase. There was a distinct difference between Aidan's and Denali's responses



Denali doing a scruff grab to Grizzer

and that difference was Maya. Likely due to Aidan's more timid personality, Maya became focused on Aidan, and when he showed excitability, she dominated him with an intensity that made him wary. If the pack began a chase, Aidan anticipated Maya's response and ran the other way, often with a high-pitched shriek before she even touched him.

Life for Denali was quite different. Contrary to Aidan's daily bouts of dominance, Denali had no boundaries. Shadow would occasionally discipline Denali if he was too obnoxious, but he did not follow through with a full pin to the ground as Maya did to Aidan. Grizzer continued his tolerant behavior for the younger pack members and did nothing to discourage Denali's constant scruff bites and wrestling behavior.

Without boundaries, a maturing wolf has the confidence to test for status without consequences. Denali

certainly fit that description and was most often observed in a behavior termed a "fore-leg stab," where a wolf pokes another wolf with a stiff front leg to show status. Other behaviors also emerged showing this confidence, including a chin rest, where a wolf rests a chin on the back of another wolf, and ride up and mounting behaviors, where a wolf climbs on the back of another wolf. Wolves are very efficient at body language. One of the most intense postures of a maturing wolf is the direct stare. A stare shows a wolf is not intimidated and is ready for a challenge. The full description of these behaviors can be found in the Center's ethogram, available through the Wolf Den Store or through the online shopping section of www.wolf.org. For updates on the pack, check the wolf logs weekly, or visit our YouTube channel for video footage of pack dynamics. ■



Malik's Retirement

On November 17, 2009, we retired Malik, an arctic wolf born in May 2000, from the Exhibit Pack. This was in response to intense pack aggression toward Malik, the lowest ranking pack member. While Malik did not sustain serious injuries during the aggression, the tendency for wolves to increase aggression as winter approaches led the Center staff and veterinarians to proactively retire Malik rather than risk significant injury. Mobbing

of lower pack members can occur in the wild, but wolves in the wild have the freedom to disperse. Captive wolves do not have that ability, so wolf managers need to be aware of tension and stress within the pack. There are issues with managing a lone wolf, but this situation may be short term — Malik's littermate, Shadow, will likely be moving into retirement in the upcoming year. To follow the progress of Malik's transition to retirement, check the wolf logs at www.wolf.org and YouTube videos posted weekly. — L.S.