

Wild Times

A Free Publication of the Wyoming Game & Fish Department

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THE HABITAT CONNECTION: THE GRAY WOLF

There is a new face in the woods. Actually, he is not all that new. He lived here once before, years ago. But he hasn't been seen or heard from in a long time. He is the gray wolf. Wolves are top predators in the food chain. They kill and eat large animals like elk, buffalo, deer and moose, helping keep those large, grazing animals under control. When there are too many elk, for example, they can eat up a lot of their food—

such as young aspen trees—and damage them.

Wolves kill some of the elk and this leaves more plants for the remaining elk to eat. Wolves live together in small groups called packs. The wolves in the pack hunt together, chasing their prey. Wolves sometimes catch sick or weak animals and the healthy ones get away safely.

When wolves kill a large animal, coyotes, foxes, vultures and other small animals also come to feed on the carcass. Grizzly bears may come, too. Wolves need wild habitat—the kind that has not been changed much by man. In Wyoming, that kind of habitat is found in the remote parts of Yellowstone National Park and



LuRay Parker

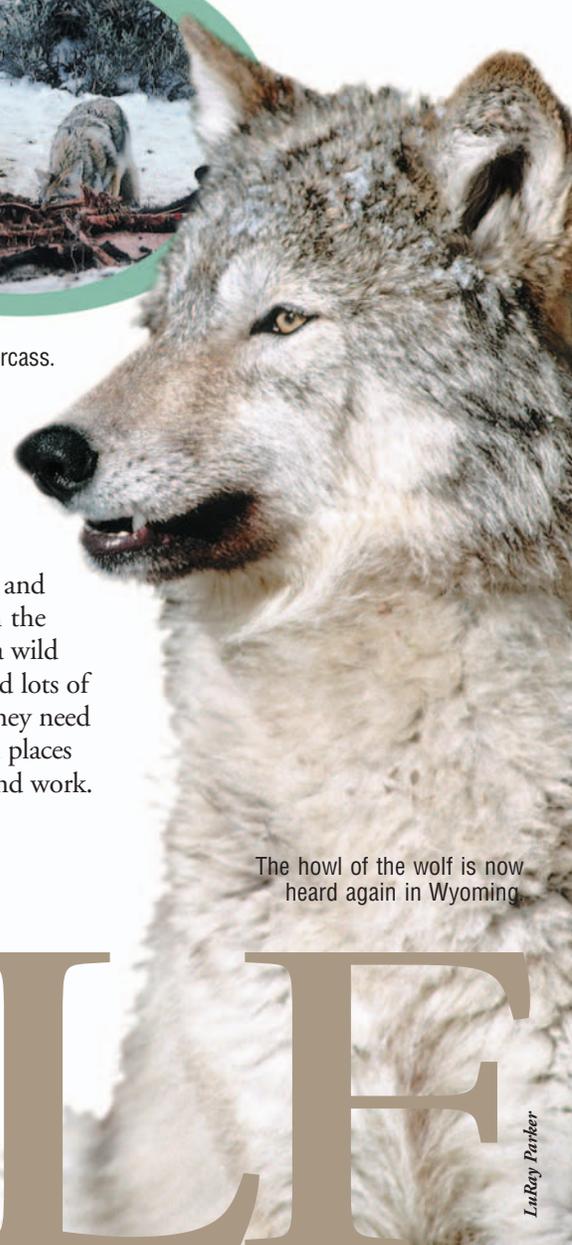
A coyote feeds on a carcass.

the surrounding rugged mountains and forests. Here, gray wolves are free once again to roam and hunt as they did in the days of old. Being a wild animal, wolves need lots of room to wander. They need to be far away from places where people live and work.

LuRay Parker



Wolves live in remote places, far from man.



The howl of the wolf is now heard again in Wyoming.

WOLF

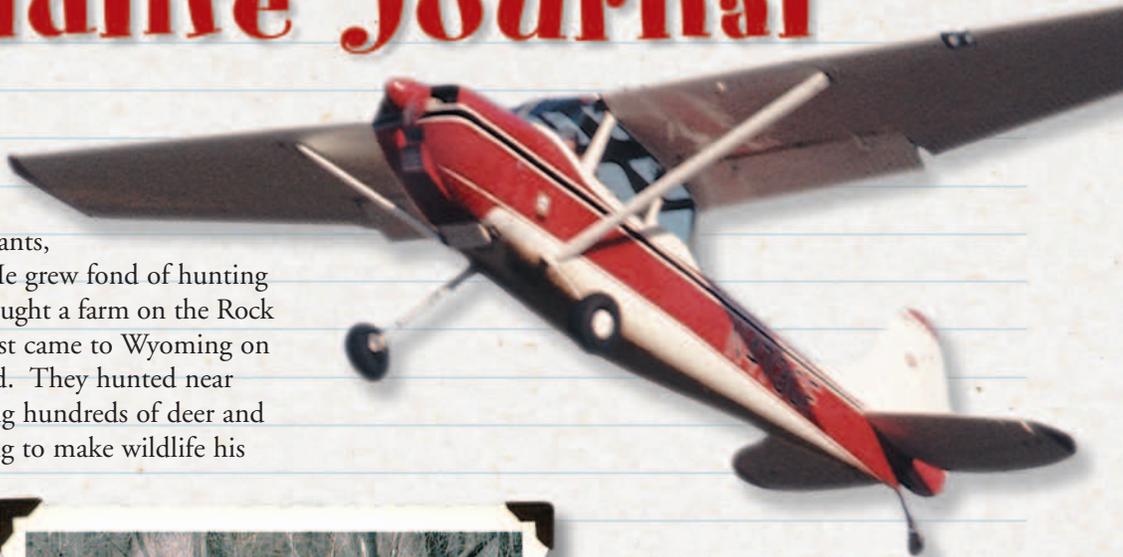
LuRay Parker



LuRay Parker

FIELD Wildlife Journal

Dave Moody has liked wildlife since he was a youngster in Illinois. Dave spent most of each autumn and winter hunting squirrels, pheasants, cottontail rabbits and waterfowl. He grew fond of hunting white-tailed deer after his parents bought a farm on the Rock River in northern Illinois. Dave first came to Wyoming on a hunting trip in 1969 with a friend. They hunted near Douglas and Dave remembers seeing hundreds of deer and antelope during the hunt. Choosing to make wildlife his career, Dave started college in Arizona and completed his studies at the University of Wyoming. He is now a biologist with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. His job is to work with large predators like grizzly bears, mountain lions and wolves. Dave says many people don't understand these animals. Instead, people believe a lot of wild stories and tall tales about them. He says the big predators are hard to find and study because they know how to stay hidden and they are good at avoiding people. In his work as a biologist, Dave has to spend some time in the office doing paperwork but he gets outside a lot, too. The most exciting thing about his work is trapping grizzly bears. His favorite memory as a predator biologist was when he trapped his first grizzly bear in a snare. Dave also gets to fly in aircraft and count bears from the air. Sometimes he sees as many as 50 bears during a single trip in the aircraft. He enjoys talking to people to help them understand bears, lions and wolves. If you would like to be a biologist and work with these animals someday, Dave suggests that you begin now to learn about their lives and habits. You will need to finish college and get your degree. Maybe someday you will be working with predators like Dave Moody.



The grizzly is another large Wyoming predator.



LuRoy Parker

Wolf country



LuRoy Parker

A biologist examines a wolf's teeth.

Biologists count wild animals from the air.

Dave's favorite memory as a predator biologist was when he trapped his first grizzly bear in a snare. Dave also gets to fly in aircraft and count bears from the air.

WILDLIFE PROFILES

The world of the gray wolf is a land of mountains, wild forests and rushing streams. The wolf is a shy creature that often stays hidden. Moving quietly in and out of the forest shadows, he seldom is seen by humans. His lonely howl is a true wilderness sound. But the wolf does not exist alone in his world. There are other animals in the food chain that



WILDLIFE PROFILES

Continued from Page 3

depend on the wolf to do his job as a predator. Here are some of the other animals who share the world of the wolf. Study the facts on the back of each card and you will learn about these creatures.

ELK

SIZE: From 450 to 1100 pounds

HABITAT: Rugged, mountainous country

FOOD: Grass, flowers, shrubs, trees

DID YOU KNOW?

- During mating season, bull elk will "bugle." The "bugle" is a loud screaming sound that can be heard from miles away.
- Elk are a favorite food of wolves.
- Elk often spend the summer deep in the forest where they are seldom seen.
- Bull elk rub their antlers against small trees and scrape the bark off the trees.

COYOTE

SIZE: As big as a medium-sized dog

HABITAT: Mountains, grasslands, sagebrush

FOOD: Small mammals, birds, carrion (the flesh of dead animals)

DID YOU KNOW?

- Some coyotes are scavengers. They feed on the carcasses of elk that have been killed by wolves.
- Coyotes start to disappear when wolves are around. Sometimes wolves may kill them or drive them away.
- Coyotes can be found in every part of Wyoming.
- You can hear coyotes barking and howling after dark and before sunrise.

GRAY WOLF

SIZE: As big as a very large dog

HABITAT: Remote areas of northwestern Wyoming

FOOD: Mostly large mammals such as elk, buffalo and deer

DID YOU KNOW?

- Wolves travel many miles each day in their hunt for food.
- Wolves can live up to 15 years, but most live only five or six.
- Wolves hunt in packs and each pack has a leader.
- Wolves "talk" to each other by making different sounds and by changing the looks on their faces.

MULE DEER

SIZE: From 70 to 475 pounds

HABITAT: Mountains, foothills, sagebrush and prairies

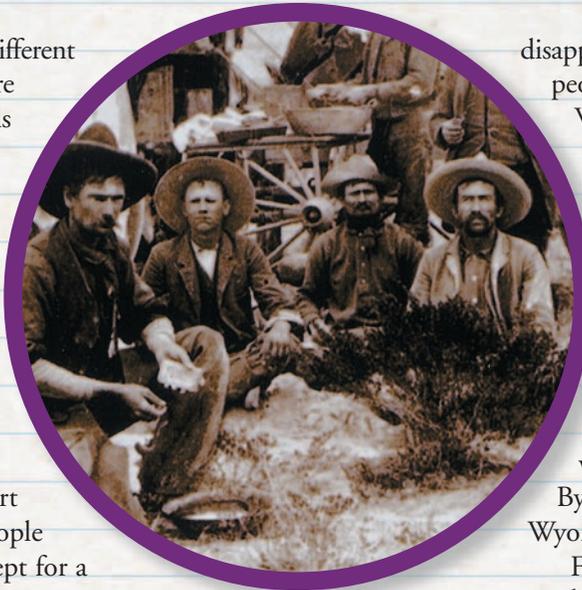
FOOD: Mostly shrubs, flowers and grasses

DID YOU KNOW?

- The mule deer gets its name from its big mule-like ears.
- Mule deer shed their antlers every year. They grow back again later on.
- Wolves prey on mule deer.
- When alarmed, mule deer bounce up and down as they run.

OUR Wildlife Heritage

The America of yesteryear was much different than the America of today. There were no cities, roads or fences. Wild animals such as buffalo and wolves roamed all over. Some of these animals gradually began to disappear as humans came west and began settling on the wild land. Wolves are one of the native Wyoming animals that disappeared. Before people settled in Wyoming, wolf packs roamed the prairies and mountains, hunting buffalo and elk. Early explorers and mountain men told of seeing many wolves in this part of the country. For the most part, people and wolves left each other alone, except for a time in the mid-1800s when wolves were hunted for their fur. Later on, one of the wolf's biggest food sources, the buffalo,



One of the wolf's biggest food sources, the buffalo, was depleted in the mid-1800s by man.

disappeared. It also was about this time that people began raising cattle and sheep in Wyoming. With their natural prey—the buffalo—gone, wolves began killing the cattle and sheep. This made them unpopular with the livestock owners. Professional hunters were hired to kill wolves. The money the hunters collected for each wolf they killed was called a "bounty." The hunters were called bounty hunters. Lots and lots of wolves were killed in the early 1900s. By the 1940s, wolves had vanished from Wyoming.

Before people settled in Wyoming, wolf packs roamed the prairies and mountains, hunting buffalo and elk.



For more than 50 years, nobody saw or heard a wolf in this state. Then, in 1995, the federal government decided that wolves should again be a part of the natural food chain in Wyoming. Not everyone agreed with this, but the government brought some captured wolves to Wyoming and let them loose in Yellowstone National Park. The wolves are still thriving in northwest Wyoming and have again become the top predators in the food chain.

A wolf pup plays outside its den.

In the 1800s, wolves preyed on herds of bison.



Around Wyoming



LuRay Parker

A wolf hunts for food in the snow.

It seems that almost everybody has an opinion about wolves. But their opinions are often very different. Some people think wolves are an important part of the food chain in Wyoming. They think it was wrong to kill them all back in the

early 1900s. These people are happy that wolves have been brought back to Wyoming. They think this was the right thing to do. Other people have different ideas about wolves. They think wolves cause too many problems because they are such large predators. These people wish wolves had not been brought back to Wyoming.

It seems that almost everybody has an opinion about wolves.



LuRay Parker

Two wolves feeding on a kill they have made.

If you ask some Wyoming ranchers and livestock owners, they might say they are worried that wolves could kill their livestock. Wolves sometimes do kill cattle and sheep. If you ask some elk hunters how they feel about wolves, they might say they are afraid wolves will kill too many elk. They might say there won't be enough elk left for hunters. Wolves certainly do kill some elk. Elk are an important part of their diet.

There are other hunters who would disagree. They do not think wolves will kill that many elk. They are happy to have the wolves back in Wyoming. Even city folk, people who seldom get out in the great outdoors, have opinions about the wolf.

Some are glad the wolf is back in Wyoming. Others are not.



Chris mardon

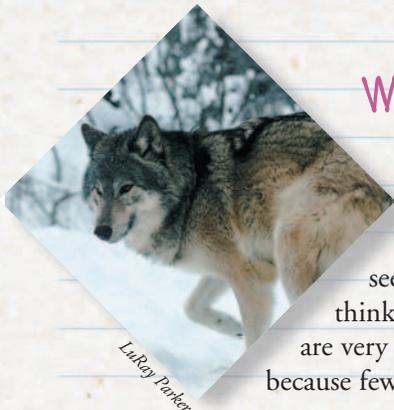
Some wild lands in scenic northwest Wyoming.

What is your opinion about having wolves in Wyoming again?

Some hunters like having wolves around, while others don't.



Outdoor Classroom

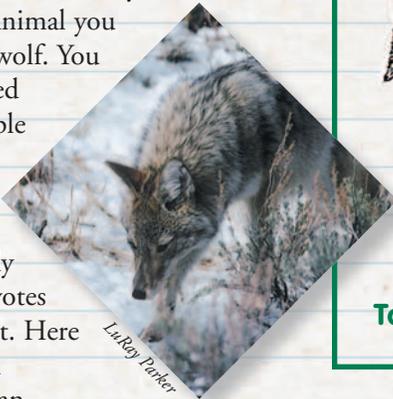


Liz Rey Parker

WOLF OR COYOTE?

Suppose you are out in the mountains and you see an animal you think is a wolf. You are very excited because few people ever get to see one.

But is it really a wolf? Wolves and coyotes look very much alike. It is not easy to tell them apart, especially if the animal is quite far away. Coyotes are seen all the time; wolves are not. Here are some ways to tell a wolf from a coyote: Wolves are much bigger than coyotes. A coyote only weighs about 30 pounds. A wolf may be three to four times as big. Check the color, too. Wolf fur usually looks darker than coyote fur. You also should notice the nose. Coyotes have pointed noses while wolves have bigger, wider noses and big jaws. Coyotes also have pointed ears, while wolves' ears are more rounded. If you think about these things, you may be able to tell if the animal you see is a wolf or not.



Liz Rey Parker

It can be hard to tell the difference between a wolf (left) and a coyote (right).

<p>COYOTE 4' long 1.5' tall Lt. gray/brown Narrow snout Tall, pointed ears</p>	<p>WOLF 6' long 2.5' tall Lt. gray/black Massive snout Round ears</p>

TRACKS

Wolves and coyotes both make footprints like dogs. Notice how much bigger wolf tracks are than coyote tracks.



COYOTE
Right front paw



WOLF
Right front paw



Right front track



Right front track

WHERE TO SEE WOLVES

If you want a good chance to see a wolf, try the Lamar River Valley in Yellowstone National Park. Visit the Yellowstone Web site at <http://www.nps.gov/yell/> for more information on wildlife in the park.



Liz Rey Parker

The Lamar Valley in Yellowstone National Park.

▶ TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE ◀

DO YOU KNOW

A group of wolves hunting together is called a _____.



NEW WORDS

PREDATOR

A predator is an animal that kills and eats other animals.

SCAVENGER

A scavenger is an animal that feeds on the bodies of dead animals.

FOOD CHAIN

Some animals eat only plants. These animals are eaten by other animals. All animals can be eaten by scavengers when they die. This is nature's food chain.

WOLFING IT DOWN

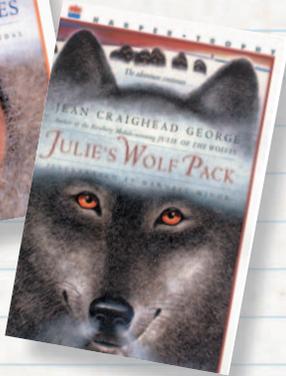
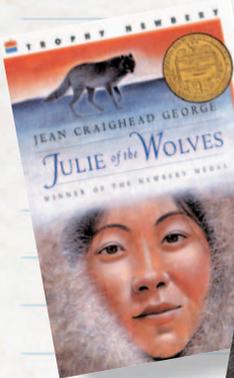
Wolves often have to go a long time without food. When they finally make a kill, they are very hungry and they fill their bellies quickly with meat.

What do you think it means when we say a person "wolves down" his food?



L. Roy Parker

▶ LEARNING LINKS ◀



BOOKS

Julie of the Wolves, Julie, and Julie's Wolf Pack
A trilogy of books by Jean Craighead George

WEB SITES

These sites have information on wolves:

<http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov/Kids/>

<http://www.thewildones.org/Animals/grayWolf.html>

<http://www.worldalmanacforkids.com/explore/animals/wolf.html>

<http://www.timberwolfinformation.org/kidsonly/kidsonly.htm>

<http://www.kidsplanet.org/factsheets/wolf.html>

FLASHCARDS

You can get more flashcards from the Wyoming Heritage Foundation, (307) 777-4529 or e-mail: wyoingheritage@wyoming.com

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