



WILDLIFE NOTES

Mexican Gray Wolf

A single, low howl echoes through the night sky rolling down the valley until it fades in the distance. Shortly another howl joins the first one and then another until a full chorus of mournful sounds fills the meadow.

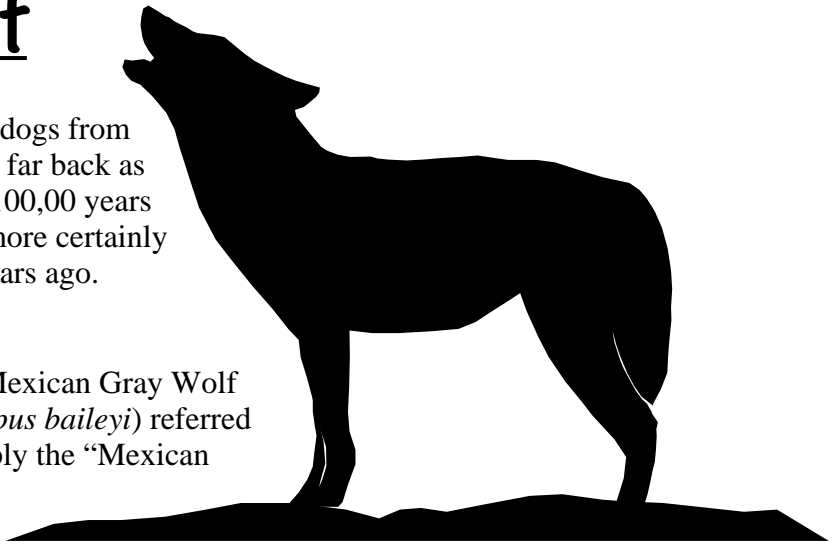
Many of us have experienced such scenes of wolves on television or video but very few of us have had such an experience in the wild. Wolves stir our imagination and interest like few other creatures. These canine carnivores have been part of our culture in literature, song, stories, and legends since our first contact with them thousands of years ago. Our connections with wolves extend to its common relative, our domesticated dogs. Recent genetic studies indicate that our human ancestors domesticated all

breeds of dogs from wolves as far back as possibly 100,000 years ago and more certainly 14,000 years ago.

Status

The Mexican Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) referred to as simply the “Mexican Wolf” or “Lobo” is one of 5

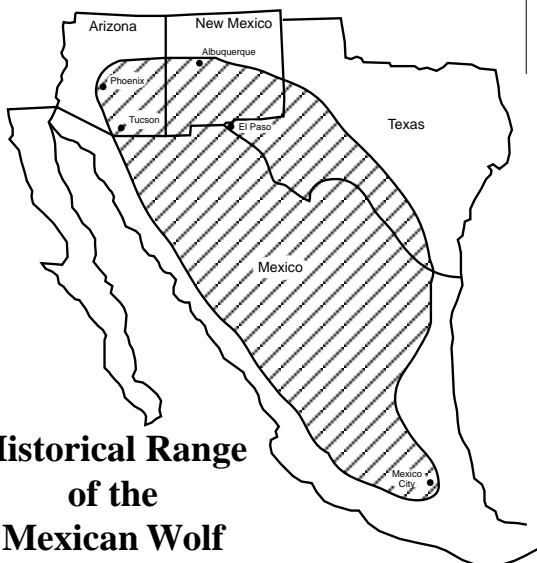
subspecies of gray wolf in North America. Historically, it was found throughout the foothills and mountains from central Mexico to southeastern Arizona, southern New Mexico and southwestern Texas. It is genetically distinct from all other wolves and is one of the rarest subspecies of gray wolf in the world. In 1976, it was federally listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as endangered. Intensive hunting, trapping and poisoning efforts (by local, state and federal agencies) from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s extirpated it from the U.S. portion of its range. By the 1950s there were very few Mexican Wolves left in the wild in the United States. The last known wild Mexican Wolf in the United States was killed in 1970. Although its status in Mexico is uncertain, there have been no documented sightings since 1980. Under legal pressure from envi-



ronmental groups, in 1990 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began Mexican Wolf reintroduction efforts in the United States. By early 1991 a general plan for reintroducing Mexican Wolves to the wild was developed.

Life History

Mexican Wolves are social animals in the dog family that live in packs as members of an extended family. They are led by a dominant pair of animals that control most of the breeding. It is usually only the dominant female which produces pups- which may or may not have been sired by the dominant male. They breed from late winter to early spring, with litters of up to six young being born after a gestation period of 63 days. All members of the pack assist in the care and feeding of the pups, which reach breeding age at about two years of age. Early on in the life of the pups,



**Historical Range
of the
Mexican Wolf**

pack members bring food back to the pups in their stomachs and regurgitate the partially digested animal remains. Wolves are natural predators of hoofed mammals and will sometimes take livestock. However, studies have shown that when adequate numbers of deer and elk are available that livestock predation is minimal.

Descriptive Details

Coyotes are often confused with wolves but wolves often run with their tail held high whereas coyotes often have their tail down. Also the howling of wolves is deeper and more resonant than coyotes. Mexican Wolves often have a grayish-brown to black coat with tawny markings on the belly, legs, and head including the face. The nose and claws are dark gray to black.

Conservation

The US Fish and Wildlife Service in March 1998 reintroduced eleven Mexican Wolves in three different family groups back

into the wild near the Blue Range Primitive Area of the Apache National Forest in eastern Arizona. In 2000, nine wolves in two family groups were reintroduced into the Gila Wilderness in the Gila National Forest north of Silver City, NM. In May of that year the Mule Pack produced the first known wild-born Mexican Wolf pups in the state in over 70 years.

In the original Environmental Impact Statement wolves were also proposed to be released into the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico but there were no plans to do so as of early 2001. The wolves that have been released are designated as a nonessential experimental population and allowed to disperse throughout the Gila National Forest in New Mexico and in the adjacent Apache National Forest in Arizona. The designation as experimental allows researchers to recapture and relocate wolves that are involved in attacking livestock or which travel outside the recov-

ery area. It also gives individual citizens more freedom in deterring any attacks on livestock. Additional family groups will be released each year for the next 4 years, if necessary, until natural reproduction can sustain their growth. The goal is to establish a wild population of approximately 100 wolves.

Population

The Mexican Wolf captive population consisted of approximately 263 animals as of January 2001. Some of these wolves are being held on the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico, which is closed to public use. The breeding and holding facility is designed to foster wild behavior by isolating them from human contact. However, captive Mexican Wolves can be viewed at other captive facilities, including the Rio Grande Zoological Park in Albuquerque, the Alameda Park in Alamogordo, the Living Desert State Park in Carlsbad, and the El Paso Zoo in Texas.



Front Track - 50% of size



Hind Track - 50% of size

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Wildlife Notes is published by the
Department of Game and Fish.
If you are interested in obtaining more copies,
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