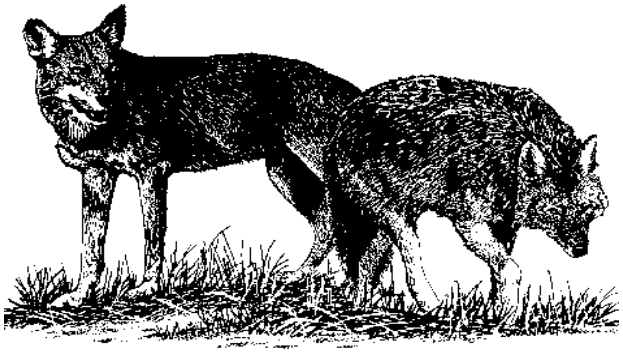
Red Wolf News

January - April 1999



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Welcome to Our New Update System !

In favor of simplifying our reporting system, we are in the process of changing from monthly to quarterly program reports. While the basic concept will be a quarterly reporting system, the time period covered will be modified at times to provide timely reporting of significant issues and activities. Such is the case with this first report which covers four months.

Northeastern North Carolina

There are currently about 75 to 80 red wolves free-ranging in the wild. All but one of those wolves were born and raised in the wild.

Red wolves reside over about 1 million acres that includes three National Wildlife Refuges, a Department of Defense bombing range, some state lands, and private property.

There are 10-15 breeding pairs or packs in the recovery area. Pack territories vary greatly (17 to 87 square miles) but average 47 square miles. Pup production estimates for the 1999 denning season will be in the next report.

Since the program began in September 1987, two wolf depredations have been confirmed. Most complaints are reports of unwanted wolf presence or depredations that do not involve wolves.

Significance of Red Wolf/Coyote Hybridization Issue Confirmed

A red wolf meeting and workshop took place April 13 through 16 in Virginia Beach, Virginia with 44 experts from across the Nation and Canada in attendance. The workshop was facilitated by the World Conservation Union's Conservation Breeding Specialist Group of Minneapolis, Minnesota and sponsored by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service.)

Brian Kelly, Red Wolf Coordinator of Field Projects, presented current red wolf/coyote hybridization data from the project in northeastern North Carolina. Since the inception of the program in 1987, 11 hybrid litters have been born in the wild; 6 litters were known hybrid and 5 were suspected. About 53 wolf litters have been born.

Several aspects of the program were initially discussed at the workshop: future site selection, hybridization, monitoring, captive breeding, and computer modeling. However, after the first day's session, it was determined that the red wolf/coyote hybridization issue could not be separated from the other aspects of management and that the entire meeting should focus on that issue. In addition, one population model revealed that if the 11 hybrid litters had not been removed from the population, the red wolf in northeastern North Carolina would be unrecognizable as such due to interbreeding with coyotes in as few as 3 to 6 generations or 12 to 24 years. The Service has known that hybridization represents a **threat** to recovery, what is not known is if hybridization will **prevent** the recovery of the red wolf.

Wolf/coyote hybridization also represents a threat to the gray wolf population in Algonquin Park in Ontario Canada. We were very fortunate to have experts from that project at the meeting.

Management plans were discussed that focused on not just managing hybridization, but understanding it. The group concluded that efforts should be made to increase the wolf population and that the wolf/coyote interaction study currently in place should continue and expand.

The Workshop Statement, endorsed by all participants, reads, *"The Red Wolf Recovery Program has had significant successes over its history, including but not limited to perpetuation of the red wolf genome in captivity, third generation wild pups, and a population distributed over one million acres. It is vital to perpetuate this success. However, hybridization in the free-ranging population has been recognized as a serious threat to the continued success of this landmark program. Because of this threat, our primary recovery focus must be protecting and promoting the growth of a self-sustaining, non-hybridizing population of red wolves in the wild and sustaining an active captive component. Actions to be taken will use an adaptive management approach that will not compromise the ability to achieve this goal."*

So what does this mean to the Red Wolf Program? The Recovery Goals call for a minimum of 220 wolves in the wild in at least 3 mainland reintroduction settings. With the cancellation of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park Red Wolf Project in October 1998, northeastern North Carolina is the single mainland project.

Pursuit of another site has been halted until the Service gains enough knowledge to determine whether the red wolf can maintain it's genetic integrity in the wild. If not, red wolf recovery will likely be limited to island situations where coyotes do not exist. However, the Service will not make any such decision until the hybridization issue is better understood. Until that time, it is important to remember that hybridization is not unique to the red wolf and that the Service's red wolf restoration efforts have resulted in a situation that will permit a better understanding of the hybridization process in other small populations of canids. As illustrated by the workshop statement presented above, the red wolf program has been very successful for many reasons. A better understanding of hybridization will likely be another contribution the red wolf program will make to species conservation worldwide.

List of Attendees

Dr. George Amato, Bronx Zoo, Geneticist
Ed Bangs, USFWS, Gray Wolf Recovery Coordinator
Dr. Karen Beck, NC State University, DVM
Gloria Bell, USFWS, Regional Office
Art Beyer, USFWS, Red Wolf Biologist
Mike Bryant, USFWS, Project Leader, Alligator River NWR
Dr. Onnie Byers, Conservation Breeding Specialist Group
Mike Chamberlain, Mississippi State University, Predator Expert
Brian Cole, USFWS, Ecological Services
Nina Fascione, Defenders of Wildlife, Wolf Coordinator
Dave Flemming, USFWS, Regional Office
Randy Fulk, NC Zoo, Conservation Breeding Specialist
Dr. Todd Fuller, University of Massachusetts, Wolf Expert
Dr. Eric Geese, Utah State University, Coyote and Wolf Expert
Jennifer Gilbreath, USFWS, Red Wolf Biologist
Dr. Karen Goodrowe, Toronto Zoo, Reproductive Physiologist
Jack Grisham, Oklahoma City Zoo, Director of Animal Management
Mary Hagedorn, Conservation Breeding Specialist Group
Dr. Phil Hedrick, Arizona State University, Geneticist
Gary Henry, USFWS, Red Wolf Coordinator
Kathy Holzer, Conservation Breeding Specialist Group
Brian Kelly, USFWS, Red Wolf Field Coordinator
Mitch King, USFWS, Geographic Assistant Regional Director, Area II
Dr. Fred Knowlton, Utah State University, Coyote Expert
Dr. Sue Lindsay, Wild Canid Survival and Research Center, Director
Chris Lucash, USFWS, Red Wolf Biologist
Ford Mauney, USFWS, Red Wolf Technician
Scott McLellan, USFWS, Red Wolf Technician
Dr. Dave Mech, USGS, Wolf Expert
Dr. Phil Miller, Conservation Breeding Specialist Group
Michael Morse, USFWS, Red Wolf Biologist
Dr. Dennis Murray, University of Idaho, Predator Expert
Dr. Ron Nowak, Taxonomic Expert
Mike Phillips, Turner Endangered Species Fund, Wolf Expert
Dr. Ulie Seal, Conservation Breeding Specialist Group
Dr. Doug Smith, NPS, Wolf Expert
Dr. Michael Stoskopf, NC State University, DVM and Genetics Expert
Dr. John Theberge, University of Waterloo, Wolf Expert
Mary Theberge, Algonquin Park, Wolf Expert
Will Waddell, Point Defiance Zoo, Red Wolf Captive Breeding Coordinator
Dr. Robert Wayne, University of California, Geneticist
Kathy Whidbee, USFWS, Red Wolf Administration
Aubrey White, Red Wolf Coalition, Executive Director
Paul Wilson, Trent University, Geneticist

Island Projects and Captive Breeding Facilities

There was no scheduled breeding on island projects in the red wolf program for the 1999 breeding season.

Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge in South Carolina currently has three wolves residing on Bull's Island, one component of that refuge.

St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge in Florida currently has two known wolves residing on the island.

Cape St. George Island in Florida currently has one wolf on the island.

There are 164 wolves in captivity at 33 breeding facilities across the nation.

More News

Summer Howling Safari Schedule for 1999 is every Wednesday June 9 through August 18. For more information, please access the following website and request a Howling Safari schedule: alligator-river@outer-banks.com .

Are you a **biology student** interested in gaining red wolf and other Service work experience ? Our **intern program** hosts one individual for about three months at a time; the work can be hard and the living quarters are remote. Write Scott McLellan, Red Wolf Technician, Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge 3255 Shore Drive Creswell, North Carolina 27928 or email at Scott_McLellan@fws.gov. The next opening is November 1 1999 through January 2000.

Please see the following websites for more red wolf information: www.outer-banks.com/alligator-river and www.wolf.org More websites will be available soon !

This newsletter is a publication of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Comments or questions can be addressed to:

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