



# Red Wolf News

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## Experts Sought to Improve Understanding of Hybridization Issue

### **Wild wolf population in Northeastern North Carolina**

- Wolf population is estimated at about 83, 44 of which are radio collared. Three hybrids and one coyote are also radio collared in the recovery area.
- Wolves range over about one million acres of public and private land.
- Known changes to the population this quarter were: three captures, three deaths, and one radio collar found without the wolf in it. It is likely that the wolf is still alive.

### **Wolves in captivity and on islands:**

- There are 163 wolves in captivity at 35 facilities across the nation.
- Wolves on Bull's Island, part of Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge off the coast of South Carolina number five in the wild.
- Wolves on St. Vincent Island National Wildlife Refuge off the panhandle of Florida number about three in the wild.
- Cape St. George Island off the panhandle of Florida has one wolf in the wild.

Almost 12 years after red wolf reintroduction efforts began in northeastern North Carolina, numbers of wild wolves have increased as has the land base on which they roam. However, coyotes are now present in the area and hybridization again threatens the Nation's only population of wild red wolves. Coyotes are an exotic (non-native) species in North Carolina, probably arriving in the last 20 years. Initial estimates indicate that the red wolf population in northeastern North Carolina would be unrecognizable in as few as 3-6 generations (12 to 24 years) if hybridization was not controlled.

Hybridization in wolves and similar species is poorly understood. It seems to threaten a species when they occur in small populations at the same location as a similar species

such as the gray wolf in eastern Canada with coyotes, the red wolf with coyotes, the Ethiopian wolf with dogs, and kit fox with swift fox, for example.

To better understand hybridization the Service has begun collaborative projects with experts at several universities, which so far includes:

The College of Veterinary Medicine at North Carolina State University, Duke University, Trent University, and the University of Idaho.

Dr. Paul Wilson at Trent University and Jennifer Adams, a graduate student of Dr. Lisette Waits at the University of Idaho, are working to insure proper identification of wolves, coyotes and hybrids



Adult red wolf drawing by Elise Hammond

via genetic analysis.

Karen Beck (DVM), a PhD student of Dr. Michael Stoskopf (DVM, PhD, Dipl. ACZM) at NCSU will be examining several aspects of coyote and red wolf biology and medicine.

Debbie Hahn, a graduate stu-

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## 1999 Denning Season

February of each year marks the height of the breeding season in red and gray wolf populations. After 63 days of gestation, wolf pups are usually born in April. This year, 14 groups of wolves exhibited denning behavior. Of these, five have been con-

firmed with at least 21 pups known to have been produced.

Wolves were also involved in eight more litters, most of which were probably hybrid in origin.

Efforts to radio collar pups

will begin in October. At that point, the pups' necks have grown enough to ensure that a radio collar can be appropriately fitted. The collar must be loose enough for some growth, but not so loose that it can slip over the wolves' heads.

# Red Wolves Online with the North Carolina Zoological Park

The North Carolina Zoo Society, with support from the Red Wolf Coalition, is sponsoring an educational, interactive website that focuses on the red wolf and its habitat in North Carolina.

The site will use cross-curriculum educational materials and programs developed by professional educators from the Chatham County, NC School District.

What separates this site from many other educational sites will



Red wolves go global

be the interactive connection between users and distant teachers and biologists that will create a "virtual" research project. Students will be encouraged to ask relevant, online questions and will receive prompt answers from the biologists. More importantly, students will be challenged to answer questions by using data collected from the field. The data is not limited to numbers; users will also have access to audio and video updates of the workdays of wolf biologists.

This project will not just expose users to red wolf biology. It will provide opportunities for students to write about and discuss the human's historical, cultural, social, and economic roles in the red wolf and other complex conservation programs.

This red wolf site will be modeled after the highly successful and award-winning "The Elephants of Cameroon" ([www.nczooeitrack.org](http://www.nczooeitrack.org)).

The location of the site is [www.nczooredwolf.org](http://www.nczooredwolf.org) and the tentative start date is September 15, 1999. See you there!

## Experts Sought, continued

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Dr. John Terborgh at Duke University, will be studying habitat preferences of red wolves using GIS analysis. Habitat differences are suspected as a contributing factor in hybridization between gray wolves and coyotes in Canada.

Dr. Dennis Murray at the University of Idaho will be modeling red wolf coyote interactions to help the Service focus data collection and recovery efforts.

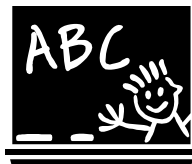
When the red wolf was first recognized as being endangered in the 1970's there were too few wolves to study the hybridization phenomenon. Through the efforts of the Service to reintroduce this species, we currently have a population of red wolves that afford this opportunity. What is currently underway on the red wolf program may not only save the red wolf, but provide valuable information upon which the management of other hybridizing species can be based. The current management plan will use a variety of

techniques, including sterilizing coyotes and hybrids, and increasing the wolf population, to establish red wolf territories that will exclude coyotes. If this is successful, not only will we save the red wolf, but in doing so will control an exotic species that traditionally has caused problems and been trouble to manage.

*Details and updates of these collaborative efforts and additional collaborations will be presented in future issues of Red Wolf News.*



Three month old red wolf pup drawing by Elise Hammond



## HEY KIDS!

**What two prey species do wolves eat the most often in the wilds of North Carolina?**

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

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