



# Red Wolf News

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## *Wild red wolf population in northeastern North Carolina*

- \* Wild red wolf population is estimated at about 100, 63 of which are radio collared. Fifteen sterilized hybrids and sterilized coyotes are also radio collared.
- \* The sterilization of hybrids and coyotes allows sterile canids to hold territorial space until wolves can replace them.
- \* Red wolves range over 1.5 million acres in northeastern North Carolina including public and private lands.

**Note: The July 2002 newsletter contained an error in the number of collared animals. It should have read 58 wolves and 17 collared hybrids and coyotes.**

## **Bulls Island Wolves Come to North Carolina**

In late September, two wolves from the Bulls Island Red Wolf Propagation Site were transferred to Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina. The 18-month-old siblings, one male, one female, arrived in excellent health and will be released separately this fall to join the world's only wild red wolf population.

Bulls Island, located on the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge off the coast of South Carolina, is one of two unique breeding locations for the highly endangered red wolf. The second location is St. Vincent Island off the gulf coast of Florida.

Wolves born on the islands are able to experience life in the wild. It is somewhat like "Wolf Boot Camp." Young wolves raised in a wild island

environment will acquire the survival skills needed for a successful life on the mainland.

The insertion of young adult wolves into the wild population requires a series of events to occur before a release. The red wolf recovery field team must first monitor the wild population to determine suitable release sites. Optimum release sites include areas where each animal could potentially find a mate and one day reproduce.

Once a release site has been chosen, a procedure known as a soft release will be implemented. An acclimation pen will be set up to hold the wolf, allowing the animal to become familiar with the local area. This will also allow for familiarity with resident wolves.

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## **The Importance of Radio Tracking**



Tracking wolves with hand-held telemetry unit.

Until recently, little was known about wild red wolves. Their early extinction in the wild had left researchers with a limited knowledge of their movements and social behavior. With the 1987 return of the red wolf to northeastern North Carolina, biologists are now able to study wild red wolves once again.

In order to study these elusive animals, biologists rely heavily on radio telemetry to track the animals. Each animal is fitted

with a radio collar that emits pulse signals or "beeps" which red wolf biologists monitor with a radio receiver. Each collar emits a unique signal, enabling the biologists to identify individual wolves.

Currently, 63 wild red wolves and 15 sterilized hybrids and coyotes are fitted with radio collars. They are monitored with ground telemetry five days a week and with aerial telemetry two to three times a week.

Many of the animals inhabit areas with dense vegetative cover which makes tracking difficult. To improve our tracking abilities, biologists installed an advanced mobile tracking system that utilizes dual antennae mounted to the top of each vehicle.

A Global Positioning System (GPS) is also used to record the vehicle position while taking telemetry readings.

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## Bulls Island Wolves Continued...

After three to four weeks within the pen, the door will be opened and the animal will be able to venture out on its own.

A soft release has been implemented with the Bulls Island male red wolf. On October 10, a site was chosen for the young male. He was then placed in an acclimation pen on Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge.

Biologists monitored the area daily, looking for signs of resident wolves visiting the pen. Within a few days,

they picked up telemetry signals coming from the collar of a resident female red wolf in close proximity to the pen.

After a few weeks, biologists opened the pen and the male wolf 11166 M stepped out onto new ground. He has currently taken up residence near the release site. We hope that he will form a pair bond with the resident female to produce pups in the spring.

Meanwhile, the red wolf field team is monitoring the wolf population to

determine a release site for the 18-month-old female.

This method of inserting 18-month-old wild red wolves offers a unique way to supplement the wild red wolf population, to enhance their genetic diversity and increase their overall chance for survival.

*The NC Zoo Website will feature video footage of the Bulls Island wolves later this year.*

**Go to: [www.nczooredwolf.org](http://www.nczooredwolf.org)**

## The Importance of Telemetry Continued...



Mobile Telemetry Vehicle

With help from the large vehicle antennae, signals can often be received up to two miles away. The data obtained from the telemetry surveys is then loaded into a software program which can locate animals to within a few meters.

The information gained from telemetry data is highly important to red wolf recovery. Telemetry provides data on red wolf locations, movements, home ranges, social structure and behavior, as well as interactions between neighboring wolf packs and interactions between wolves and coyotes.

Data continues to be collected to examine the hypothesis that coyotes will become increasingly displaced by red wolves as the wild wolf population grows. Early evidence suggests that some red wolves are beginning to displace coyotes out of their territories, but further research is needed to confirm or reject this hypothesis.

If the red wolf can once again defend its territories against coyotes, the level of effort needed to manage red wolves may one day be reduced.



Collared Red Wolf, Photo by Barron Crawford

### *Searching for the Pamlico Pack*

In late August, red wolf field biologists lost contact with two collared wolves of the Pamlico Pack which typically range throughout the southeastern portion of Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. The two wolves disappeared shortly after a wild fire broke out in the area. Extensive ground and aerial telemetry surveys as well as track surveys have failed to locate the wolves. The biologists will attempt siren surveys in hopes of hearing a howling response from animals in the area.

### *Captive red wolf population and Island Programs*

There are approximately 160 adult wolves in captivity at 37 facilities nationwide. There are 2 wolves on Bulls Island at Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge off the coast of South Carolina, and 2 wolves reside on St. Vincent Island National Wildlife Refuge off the coast of Florida.



Adult male red wolf with pup at the Museum of Life & Science, Durham, N.C. Photo by Greg Koch



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