

## Wolves in Colorado

The gray wolf, sometimes called the timber wolf, is truly an animal wrapped in mystique and legend. Wolves have been a spiritual symbol to Native Americans, a religious symbol to others and a sign of evil to some. The wolf is hated by ranchers because they kill livestock, and hated by hunters because they kill big game.

An area I frequented with my Dad in Ontario back in the '60s was loaded with moose and bear. The wolf moved in, and within five years there were no longer any moose or deer around. In the 1990s, an outbreak of mange came through and most of the wolf population died off. Now, the deer numbers are back up and the moose have begun to reappear. Old Mother Nature has a strange sense of humor.

Wolves were very common in Colorado, where they once fed on herds of buffalo, elk and deer. When market hunting wiped out the herds of game, the wolves turned to livestock as a new food source. Of course, this did not sit well with ranchers and wolves were eradicated in the state by shooting, trapping and poisoning. The last wolves in Colorado were killed off by 1940.

A wolf is about the size of a very large dog, standing 2-and-a-half feet tall at the shoulder. A male can weigh in at as much as 180 pounds, and has a lifespan of five to six years. Their color is very similar to a coyote, pale gray with some white and overlain on the back and legs with black.

At 180 pounds, they can still reach speeds of 35 mph, which is why they are so hard on livestock and big game. They do have a packing instinct and can attack in packs with the veracity of a squadron of Tiger Tanks.

Wolf attacks on humans are very rare. In wolf country, you have a better chance of dying from a bee sting than suffering a wolf attack. Wolves by nature are a shy creature and would just as soon not have anything to do with people. I guess I can understand that with everyone shooting at or trying to poison you, but not without good cause mind you.

I did read that the Associated Press stated that the government of India reported over 100 human deaths caused by wolves in one year during the 1980s. Further, in 1878, British officials in Uttar Pradesh recorded the death of 624 humans by wolves. This shows that



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

and Canada, by Mark McNay documented 80 cases of wolf-human interaction in the past 60 years and none of them were fatal to the humans. Only 25 cases showed unprovoked aggression by the wolf, yet only 13 resulted in injury to humans. Many of the acts of aggression by wolves can be linked to rabies.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have restored wolves into Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico and Arizona. There has been much discussion of them being reintroduced in Colorado but opposition has been fierce. Most ranchers and hunters would rather have a hurricane, so it does not appear like it will happen anytime soon.

Don't breathe a sigh of relief just yet. Wolves can cover many miles. The encroachment of humans on their territory will drive them into Colorado on their own. In fact, there have been a number of wolves already reported in the state.

In 2004, a wolf was killed in a vehicle collision on I-70 near Idaho Springs. There have been even more unconfirmed encounters reported, so the wolf is making his presence known in Colorado.

In 2015, near Walden, Colorado, a trail camera captured pictures of a wolf. During the same year, a man hunting coyotes near Wolford Mountain Reservoir, just north of Kremmling, killed an animal later identified as a gray wolf. The USFWS chose not to prosecute the hunter after they determined he was hunting legally and did not intentionally kill the wolf. He also immediately reported the incident to Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

There have been reports of people who had wolf dog hybrids, as pets and turning them loose in the wild, when they figured out they could not handle them. This hybrid is very unmanageable and dangerous.

even though wolves in the States generally leave people alone, they are capable of carnage.

A Case History of Wolf-Human Encounters in Alaska



(Top) This red wolf really blends in with the surrounding landscape making him difficult to spot. Sighting a wolf is a rare occurrence. (Bottom) Close-up picture of a mature Gray Wolf. (Photos courtesy of USFWS)



It is a really bad idea to just set them free in the wild, as they are dangerous to all other creatures.

A reminder to everyone that wolves are protected under the federal Endangered Species Act in Colorado. This act states that killing a wolf carries criminal charges with punishment of up to a year in prison and a fine up to \$100,000.

If you do see a wolf in the wild, enjoy the experience and keep your distance. A wolf is a beautiful animal and I have enjoyed the ones I saw in Canada and may see one in Colorado someday, as long as they leave our

livestock and big game alone.

Any wolf sighting in Colorado should be reported to Colorado Parks and Wildlife. They have a wolf sighting form on their website.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and an avid hunter that travels across North America in search of adventure who serves as a Director and Public Information Officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org)

### Learn to hunt bears at workshop March 7

If you've ever wanted to hunt bears or if you want to improve your chances of harvesting one, plan to attend a workshop sponsored by Colorado Parks and Wildlife on March 7 in Delta.

Wildlife officers from Colorado Parks and Wildlife will lead the presentation on hunting black bears. They'll discuss bear biology, hunting tactics, field dressing, rules and regulations, and human-bear conflict issues.

Bear populations are healthy in Western Colorado, providing hunters a unique hunting opportunity. The majority of the bear harvest takes place in September when the animals are

foraging heavily for acorns and berries in preparation for their winter hibernation. Areas throughout Montrose and Delta counties offer ideal habitat for bears; so hunters in this area have a good chance of harvesting — if they know where to look.

The class will be held from 6-8:30 p.m., March 7, at the Technical College of the Rockies (formerly Delta Voc-Tech), 1765 U.S. Highway 50. The class is limited to 50 people and registration is required. To register, call the Montrose wildlife office at 970-252-6000.



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### What do a liquor store manager...

...an environmental specialist, an R&D specialist and a Dick's Sporting Goods store associate have in common? They are "The Rejects" - the USA curlers who finished in last place at the 2014 Sochi Olympics. USA Curling cut them and developed an elite curling team. The self-named Rejects trained and battled back over the last 4 years, beating the elite team so badly on the curling circuit, that USA Curling had to take another look at them. This is the team that won the first USA gold medal in curling since its inclusion in the Olympics in 1998! They won with desire, hard work, a can do spirit, and a lot of heart!

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