

**LITERARY
NONFICTION**
nonfiction that uses
literary techniques

Nonfiction

SAVING AMERICA'S WOLVES

They were hunted and killed almost to extinction.
Now these fearsome and important predators are
making a comeback. But they need your help.

By Kristin Lewis

As You Read What threats do wolves face?

Imagine you are a gray wolf in the Montana wilderness. You are one of the most fearsome predators on Earth. Your 42 razor-sharp teeth can rip flesh and crush bone. You can sniff out a deer a mile away. Animals many times your size flee in terror at the sight of you.

Holly Kuchera/istock.com



You aren't just any wolf either. You are the alpha of your pack. That means you are the leader. You dominate the seven other wolves in your pack, standing tall and proud over them. You decide when the pack eats and when the pack travels. You also decide when the pack hunts.

Your kills are as dramatic as a high-speed car chase in an action movie. You will **stalk** a herd of elk for days and days before choosing one to eat. You aren't afraid to go after an elk that is 500 pounds heavier than you, though you do prefer the weakest ones—the oldest or youngest or sickest.

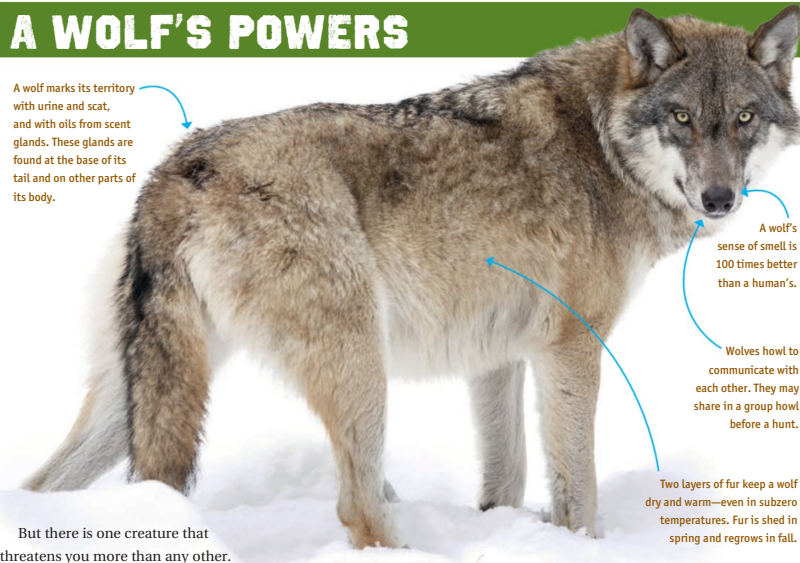
When you're ready to strike, you and your pack work together in deadly harmony. You chase your target until it's alone, separated from its herd and utterly exhausted. Then you and your pack pounce, latching on to the elk's neck and legs with your powerful jaws—until at last the elk collapses in a bloody heap.

You and your pack then begin to feast, your bellies swelling with flesh, your faces turning red with blood.

As a wolf, you are more than a magnificent predator: You are an **apex predator**—at the top of the food chain. But in spite of your powers, you face many threats. One kick from an elk or a moose can break your jaw. Diseases like mange can cause you to lose your fur, leaving you shivering in the cold. Other wolves can challenge you to a deadly fight for control of your territory.

A WOLF'S POWERS

A wolf marks its territory with urine and scat, and with oils from scent glands. These glands are found at the base of its tail and on other parts of its body.



A wolf's sense of smell is 100 times better than a human's.

Wolves howl to communicate with each other. They may share in a group howl before a hunt.

Two layers of fur keep a wolf dry and warm—even in subzero temperatures. Fur is shed in spring and regrows in fall.

But there is one creature that threatens you more than any other. Humans.

For hundreds of years, humans in America have hunted, poisoned, and trapped your kind. They have driven your species almost to extinction.

And they aren't finished with you yet.

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It's a brisk winter day, and you and your pack are trotting through the snow when you sense that a human is drawing near. Fear washes over you. A member of your own pack was recently shot by a human. You tried to help him as best you could, licking his coat and bringing him food.

But he did not survive his wounds. You still mourn his loss. Is a human now coming to kill you too?

THE BIG BAD WOLF

Flashback to hundreds of years earlier: Back then, your ancestors were also stalked by humans. These humans **despised** your kind because you terrified them. They didn't understand your ways.

To America's first European settlers, you were more than just a nuisance that ate their chickens and goats. You were a stone-cold killer, a monster even. In the

head was chopped off and sold for money. Your fur was turned into fashionable hats and coats for humans to wear.

And then you were gone. By the 1920s, in most parts of America, none of your kind was left.

NOT A MONSTER

But not all humans hated your kind. Not all of them wanted you dead.

In the 1970s, many humans began to realize that you are not the monster from fairy tales, that those stories had been greatly exaggerated. It is not in your nature to attack humans. You are afraid of them and avoid them whenever you can.

Humans began to understand that the Earth needs you.

After your species disappeared, the populations of elk exploded. That's because wolf packs like yours weren't there to hunt them. The elk gobbled up trees and grasses that other animals needed for survival. Birds couldn't build their nests. Beavers couldn't build their

dams. Without beavers building dams in rivers, the rivers became more powerful and deep, which changed the types of plants that could grow nearby. In addition, coyotes, ravens, and other scavenging animals lost a food source: They could no longer pick at the carcasses that wolves left behind after a kill.

Informational Text

THE WOLF PACK A tight-knit community

The size of a wolf pack can range from 2 wolves to 36, though the average size is around 6. Packs are tight-knit communities. The pack hunts and plays together. They groom by licking each other's fur and may give extra attention to pack members that are sick or injured.

Typically, the breeding male and female are the alphas of the pack, though one may be more dominant than the other. An alpha shows dominance by standing tall, chest puffed out, tail high. Beta wolves are the second in command. They show respect to the alphas by lowering their heads and crouching. The omega wolves are at the bottom of the pack's hierarchy. They show submission by lying on their sides or backs.



To bring you back.

In the mid-1990s, wildlife experts caught 31 gray wolves up in Canada. These wolves were brought down and set free in central Idaho as well as in Yellowstone National Park—2.2 million acres of protected wilderness in Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho. Scientists hoped that these wolves would reproduce and form new packs.

To the joy of those scientists, that is exactly what happened.

In less than two decades, there were 1,600 wolves in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. In fact, you can trace your family history to those first wolves brought from Canada. They are your relatives—your great-great-great grandparents.

Many humans were
thrilled to hear your kind
once again howling across

Their eyes open after about two weeks, and they step out of their dens in about three weeks. By the time pups are 6 months old, they are almost as big as the adults. To feed pups, a wolf may regurgitate—that is, vomit—meat for the pups to enjoy.



**Wolf pups in
their den in
Minnesota.
Inset: a pair
of pups in
Montana**



your ancestral home. Thousands of tourists now flock to Yellowstone National Park every year, hoping to catch a glimpse of you in your natural habitat. You have dazzled and inspired new generations of

wolf lovers. Many scientists spend their days studying you, and they are learning more and more about your amazing ways. They say that you are helping to repair the ecosystem in Yellowstone too. Elk

populations are now much smaller and healthier, in part because of wolf packs like yours. The government says you are no longer **endangered** there.

But not all humans are happy about your return. Some human hunters resent that you catch

and kill the same prey they do. Some ranchers are angry because some of your kind are once again preying on their cattle—after all, livestock is far easier for you to hunt than wild elk and moose. (The government pays ranchers for any livestock killed by wolves, though proving that a wolf was responsible can be complicated.)

Some humans say there are too many of you now—that you wander off protected lands and into places where humans live. Some states have allowed humans to once again hunt your kind outside of national parks.

You have stirred up a fierce debate among humans. Right now, some humans are arguing that you should be protected, even in places where your numbers are stable and healthy. They say that hunting your kind shouldn't be allowed.

Which brings us back to you on that winter day when you sense a human nearby.

You do not know what is about to happen. But your instincts tell you that you are in mortal danger.

Suddenly, a deafening noise thunders from the sky. The noise comes from a helicopter, but you don't know what a helicopter is.

You break into a full-speed run, zigzagging across the snow. But you aren't fast enough to outrun the flying metal monster that is chasing you.



It's generally accepted that there are two species of wolf: the red wolf and the gray wolf. In the lower 48 states of the U.S., some wolf populations are considered threatened or endangered. But in Alaska, wolves have never been endangered. Today, as many as 11,200 wolves live there.



A wolf pack's territory is the area in which it lives, hunts, and raises its pups. Packs defend their territory against other wolves. Gray wolf territories may be less than 100 square miles in the lower 48 states and more than 1,000 square miles in Alaska and Canada.



A gray wolf with a radio collar in Denali National Park, Alaska

RADIO COLLARS Scientists use radio collars like this to track and study wolves. When trying to collar a wolf, scientists in helicopters are careful not to chase any wolf for too long. If they can't catch a wolf within a few minutes, they leave and try another day. That way, the wolf doesn't become too stressed or exhausted.

Minutes pass.

Your muscles ache. You grow weary. But you don't stop running.

The helicopter swoops low. There is a man perched inside, and he has something aimed at you.

And then—

Click.

Your body collapses. Everything goes dark.

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You are not dead.

This human did not come to kill you. He came to help you. It was not a bullet that hit you. It was a **tranquilizer** dart, which has put you into a deep sleep.

The helicopter lands nearby. A man hops out and rushes to your side. He is a wildlife expert who has

dedicated his life to studying and caring for your species. He and his highly trained team set up a makeshift station in the snow. They take your blood to study and see what diseases you've been exposed to. They weigh you, check your teeth, and measure your paw size. They record their observations in their journals.

They work quickly; they must finish before you wake up. They know that if you are exposed to humans, you could lose your fear and you may be more likely to wander closer to where people live. That could put you in danger.

Finally, they put a collar around your neck that has a special radio inside. This radio collar will help them track your movements and learn more about your habits and behavior. Everything they learn will help them better understand you and your kind.

Of course, you don't know any of this. You are still fast asleep.

When you wake up, the human who had been chasing you seems to be gone. So too is that terrible noise.

You stand, snow flecking your muzzle. You lift your head high and let out a long howl.

In the distance, your pack howls back to you.

They are waiting for you to come home. ●

Writing Contest

The author chose to write this article in the second person. What impact does this choice have on the reader? Support your answer to this question with text evidence. Send your response to **Wolf Contest**. Five winners will get *Rewilding* by Jane Drake and Ann Love.



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