

ANIMALS ATTACK!

Wolves

Elizabeth J. Scholl



Chapter 4

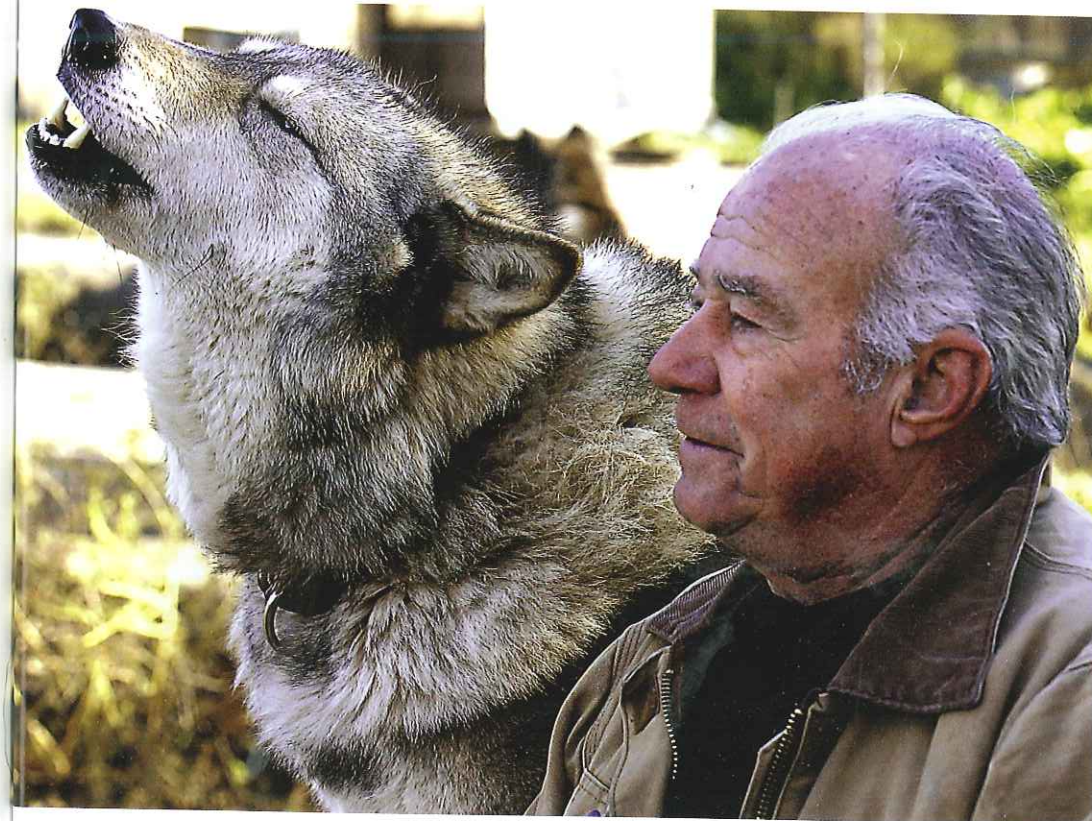
Wolf Hybrids: Pets or Killers?

Most attacks by wolves on humans are by wolf-dog hybrids and captive wolves. Wolf-dog hybrids are animals that are part wolf and part dog. People keep wolf hybrids as pets for different reasons. Some people think owning a hybrid is like owning a wild wolf. They think it is cool to own something wild. Other people like having a pet that is unusual. Wolf experts agree hybrids can be dangerous to children and other animals. As with wild wolves, the majority of attacks by wolf hybrids have been on small children. Hybrids have even been known to attack children that they know and have played with many times.

The Beast of Gévaudan

Wolf hybrids have existed for hundreds of years. Attacks by these animals were recorded as far back as the 1700s. The most famous story of a hybrid attack comes from France. Between 1764 and 1767, the Beast of Gévaudan, or La Bête du Gévaudan, terrorized the French countryside. La Bête was responsible for killing at least sixty-four people and maybe as many as one hundred. At the time, some people thought the

An animal trainer sits next to a howling wolf hybrid. Like wild wolves, wolf hybrids have been known to attack people.



Beast of Gévaudan was a werewolf, and others thought it was a demon. A 1764 poster warning people to beware of the Beast described the animal as “reddish brown with dark ridged stripe down the back. Resembles wolf/hyena, but big as a donkey. Long gaping jaw, 6 claws, pointy upright ears and supple furry tail. . . . Cry: more like a horse neighing than a wolf howling. Last seen by people mostly now dead.”⁶

In this painting, the fearsome Beast of Gévaudan pounces on a small child.



Under the king's orders, La Bête was hunted by many men, who used weapons, traps, and poisons. It was thought to have been killed on five separate occasions, but attacks continued after each. Finally, in 1767, a deformed wolflike animal was killed, and the attacks ended.

The story of the Beast of Gévaudan is so mysterious and gruesome that a 2002 horror film titled *Brotherhood of the Wolf* was based on it. Though it is not a well-known story in the United States, everyone in France has heard of La Bête. In France, the story of the Beast of Gévaudan has been called “the Greatest Enigma of History.” An enigma is a mystery, or something that cannot be understood.

Solving the Mystery

According to C.H.D. Clarke, a Canadian naturalist who investigated the Gévaudan attacks, it is likely that there were two animals responsible, and they were probably wolf hybrids. This explains why attacks continued after they thought they had killed the Beast. At the time in France, huge dogs called mastiffs were often kept as guard dogs. It is quite possible that wolf-mastiff hybrids could be the size of the animals described by people and could be as aggressive, particularly if they had rabies. The two animals believed to be the killers weighed 130 pounds and 109 pounds, which is larger than any wild wolf in that area. Measurements of the animals' skulls proved that the animals were more dog than wolf.

A Deadly Combination

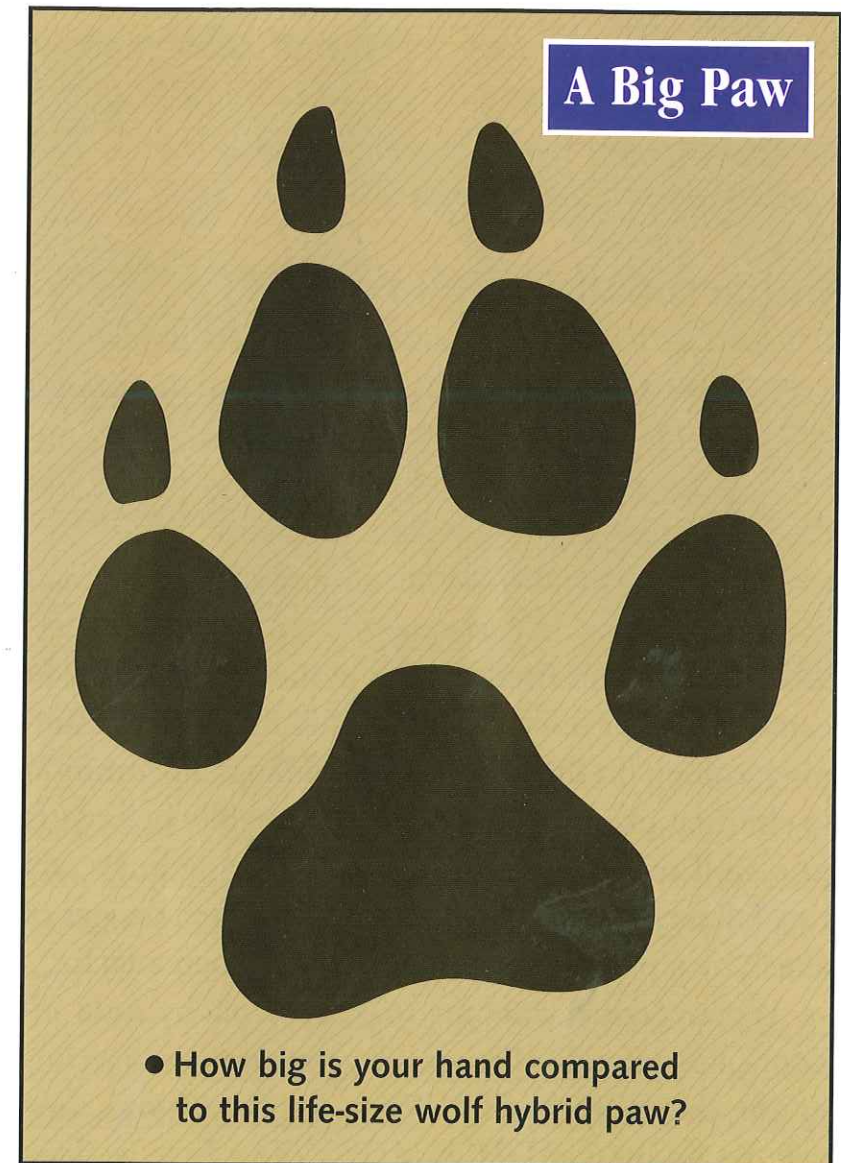
Wolf hybrid experts estimate that between three hundred thousand and five hundred thousand wolf hybrids live in the United States today. In recent years, stories of wolf hybrid attacks have appeared in the news. In Michigan, in 1990, two-year-old Tanya Elliot was killed by a wolf hybrid that belonged to a family friend whom she was visiting. The child had met the animal on other visits and had played with it without any problems. This time, Tanya's mother allowed her toddler to play alone in the backyard. The animal was kept outside, chained up. When they noticed the animal shaking something, they went outside to see what it was; it was Tanya. She had gone too close to the animal, and it had attacked her.

It is hard to believe something so horrible could happen right in someone's backyard. There were several very serious mistakes made and none were the fault of two-year-old Tanya. A young child should never be left alone with any animal, let alone one as unpredictable as a wolf dog. Wolf hybrid experts agree that hybrids should never be kept chained up because this can cause them to act more aggressively, which can lead to an attack.

A similar story was reported in Florida in 1988. A wolf hybrid had been adopted from an animal shelter. The same day it was brought to its new home, the animal escaped from its owner's yard. A neighbor found the animal and put it in her backyard while she tried to contact the owner. Her four-year-old son

tried to play in the yard with the animal and was attacked and killed by it.

Another hybrid incident involved a wolf hybrid named Dakota who attacked a 10-year-old boy in a California supermarket parking lot. As he sat on the



curb eating an ice cream cone, the boy was grabbed by the animal and dragged twenty feet. Its owner said Dakota was just being playful and wanted some of the boy's ice cream. What makes this story more shocking is the fact that Dakota was used by its owner as part of his wolf wildlife education program, and was brought into classrooms to educate children about wolves. The 140-pound hybrid was reported to have jumped at a girl during a program at a high school and shredded her sweatshirt.

Unpredictable Behavior

Between 1979 and 1992 fourteen people in the United States were killed by wolf hybrids. Most of them were children. The behavior of the wolf hybrid is very unpredictable. Even if the animal has been friendly in the past, it may attack a person at any time.

Wolves and wolf hybrids commonly see human children as pups. In this case, the animals will generally act calm and friendly. But certain behaviors can cause a wolf or a hybrid to see a child as prey. Running, rolling on the ground, and yelling, all common to children playing, can appear as preylike behaviors to a wolf or a hybrid. In the wild, prey animals will run, fall down, or make loud noises when in danger of attack by a predator. The predator will then attack.

When people attempt to keep wolf hybrids indoors, the animals often destroy property such as furniture, doors, and walls. When kept outdoors, they will dig up the yard. Hybrids can dig a hole as deep



Although many people keep hybrids as pets, these animals can be dangerous to children.

as six feet. They often cannot be housebroken. Once they are no longer puppies, many owners find their hybrids too difficult to care for, even if they wanted a wolf dog when they first got it.

Sadly, there is no safe place for these animals. As they are known to be dangerous as pets, even most animal shelters will not accept hybrids. And because they have not been raised in the wild, hybrids that

are released or abandoned by their owners into the wild generally do not survive. They do not know how to hunt for food, and they are not likely to be accepted by a wild wolf pack.

A hungry wolf leaps into the air to snatch prey from a tree. Although wolves usually avoid people, they will attack humans under certain conditions.



Conclusion

Wolves do not usually seek out humans as prey, but they are hunters, and under certain conditions, they can and will attack people. Wolves and wolf hybrids are capable of killing people.

To help avoid conflicts with wolves, do not leave food or garbage outside, do not feed any wildlife, and do not leave pets unattended outside. These simple actions can help save the lives of both humans and wolves. There is an expression, "a fed wolf is a dead wolf," which means that a wolf fed by humans will lose its natural fear of people and learn that hanging around areas where humans are offers rewards. In most places, any wolf reported to be wandering in areas that humans use, such as campsites, will be shot to avoid the chance of a person being hurt.

Most people will never see a wolf in the wild. There is a greater chance of getting killed by lightning, a car collision with a deer, or even a bee sting, than being attacked by a wolf. However, the small number of wolf attacks that do occur remind us that a wolf is a predator and an animal that should be respected for its ability to attack and kill.