

Six injured in rare wolf attack

SAULT STE. MARIE (Sep 7, 2006) Hamilton Spectator

A lone wolf that attacked six people, including several young children, in a provincial park over the long weekend has tested negative for rabies, the Algoma Health Unit said yesterday.

The wolf, which has been blamed for several separate attacks Monday at the popular Katherine's Cove beach on Lake Superior was shot by park staff.

The wolf had a broken clavicle and tooth when it was shot following the attacks, which may explain its abnormal behaviour, said health unit inspector Bob Frattini.

"Wolves work in packs and not individually, and it was probably ostracized," Frattini said.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency plans to conduct further testing on the wolf's body to try and find other possible causes for the attacks, which left several families injured and badly shaken.

The attack on the Wright family occurred on Bathtub Island, a large rocky area within wading distance of the mainland and about 100 metres south of Katherine's Cove.

Brenda Wright, on a day trip with her sister-in-law, two children and their cousins, aged 10 and 13, said her family was probably attacked first. Park officials say they aren't sure about the order of the attacks.

Her son, Casey, 12, noticed a black, doglike animal running across the beach.

She said the animal nipped the ankle of her 13-year-old nephew, Jake, then clamped down on her son's buttock, carrying him about half a metre before dropping him and lunging at her.

The wolf's teeth tore into her hands and her leg as she fought back and the group raced into the shallow swimming area. Wright said the wolf followed them, this time going after Emily Travaglini-Wright, 14.

"(Emily) was a real fighter. . . She got mostly claws in her head and her arm," her mother said.

Alerted by the screams, two strangers raced over and managed to scare off the wolf. As families hid in the trees, the wolf returned minutes later and rifled through their picnic stashes.

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For Jerry and Rachel Talbot, it started at around 4 p.m. The Wawa, Ont., couple, on their way to a wedding in Sudbury, with granddaughters Leah, 3, and Madison, 5, pulled off Highway 17 for a quick swim at a popular picnic area in Lake Superior Provincial Park.

According to park staff, more than a dozen others were enjoying the end of the Labour Day weekend at Katherine's Cove when the Talbot family wandered onto the beach and began to remove their shoes.

Jerry Talbot noticed a black animal chasing a girl across the sand. Too slow for the girl, the animal veered off and grabbed a slower, smaller target: Leah.

It clamped its jaws around the blond toddler's left upper arm and began dragging her away from her grandmother and sister.

The girl was dragged about six metres before the wolf dropped her on her back, startled by the shrieks of her grandparents and those who had jumped in to help.

Leah started to run, but she was in sand and she was in shock.

The wolf grabbed the hood of the little girl's black jacket. This time, Rachel Talbot's advances and screams caused the wolf to drop the girl momentarily and she lunged forward, scooped up the child and raced to her vehicle. Jerry Talbot and Madison were close behind.