



The HOWLING REPORTER

FALL EDITION • AUGUST, 2021



High-Content female wolfdog, Naia

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WILDSPIRITWOLFSANCTUARY.ORG/GIFTSHOP

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Brittany proudly sporting a Tyvek® suit after single-handedly cleaning out one of our trash trailers. Be grateful this isn't a scratch-n-sniff issue!

LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRITTANY McDONALD

As many of you know, across the globe there have been so many businesses that have had to shut down as a result of COVID-19, and Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary was no exception. Since March of 2020, we have been completely closed to the general public—at first, as a result of government mandates, then as a means to continue working on some essential projects throughout the sanctuary.

Fortunately, the decision to remain closed has been a hugely positive one, as it has allowed us to make some major facility improvements, particularly in regards to our habitats, but also in relation to our public tour paths and other aspects of the sanctuary that guests will get to experience when we finally re-open! For example, we've been adding more natural features to our enclosures, including cave houses, hills, rocks, and trees, and have even made some big expansions to several enclosures located directly on our tour path, including our domestic dogs, foxes, and dingoes.

We're also currently in the process of re-vamping our old tour path in order to prepare for a complete upgrade (ideally in 2022), installing new barrier fencing, and constructing a brand new Education Building where guests will get to participate in hands-on, interactive learning. The building itself will be outfitted with a wide variety of materials meant to teach visitors about each of the species in our care (and some of the animals they call prey), in order to suite a wide audience of all ages, and leave a more long-lasting impact. If you're passionate about wildlife and education and have suggestions for things you'd like to see included in our new educational programing, let us know!

Re-Opening Thursday, September 16th, 2021!

On top of all the physical upgrades guests can look forward to, we will also be making a lot of changes to how our tours will function moving forward. In the past, we've provided visitors with guided tours where they could learn about the various species of animals in our care, in addition to individual rescue's stories. Moving forward, however, will be offering self-guided tours of the entire lower compound, complete with access to our Education Building. This will provide guests with an opportunity to view our rescues at their own pace—even spending an entire day at the sanctuary, should they choose—and thanks to the creation of new signage that will be posted throughout the facility, individuals will still have the same opportunities to learn about each rescue on the tour path, in addition to all of our species.

The way that our new self-guided tours will work is that we will be offering public access 4 days a week, Thursday - Sunday, where we will be open from 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM in the summer months, and from 11:00 AM - 3:00 PM in the winter months, adjusting the schedule slightly to account for changes due to Daylight Saving's Time. During these hours, people are welcome to enjoy the public tour path at their leisure, and spend as much time as they would like on the property.

We will also be offering Specialty Tours, scheduled by appointment only, that will allow guests looking for a more in-depth or interactive experience the chance to participate in feeding, enrichment, or a sort of "Behind the Scenes" VIP look at the sanctuary. To learn more about these tours specifically, visit our website and check out the "Tours" tab.

As we move closer to our anticipated re-opening date, we hope that all of our Howling Supporters will bear with us as we continue to make these vital improvements to the sanctuary. We hope that anyone who visits will find the time that we've been closed well spent once they see all the new changes. But until then, on behalf of myself, the team, and all of our rescues, we can't wait to have you all back!

Three panels of a light-colored wolf splashing in a metal tub. The top panel shows the wolf's head and front legs in the water. The middle panel shows the wolf's head and front legs, with water splashing around it. The bottom panel shows the wolf's head and front legs, with water splashing around it. The background is a bright orange gradient with a yellow wavy line.

KEEPING THEIR

COOL

by Victoria Uliano

Summertime in the high desert of New Mexico is nothing to mess around with. With our extremely high elevations and dry air, during the day time it regularly reaches - and stays in - an 85 degree to 98 degree Fahrenheit temperature range (29 to 36 degrees Celsius). Wolves and wolfdogs aren't strangers to hot environments, but even after shedding their thick winter coats, and with ample shade in their enclosures, they still get hot during the peak hours of the day. As their Caretakers, it's important for us to ensure that our animals are as comfortable as they can be. If we as humans are uncomfortable in the heat, it's likely the animals are uncomfortable too. Therefore, we take a number of measures to ensure that all of our rescues are properly cared for during this time of the year.

First, all of our animals have access to water buckets 24/7, that are cleaned and refilled every single morning, and topped off with water as needed throughout the day. This is especially important to stay on top of during the hotter months, as the canines are drinking more water than they do in the winter.

Every enclosure also has a splash tub inside of it. This is a large basin of water that is big enough for the animals to climb into and lay down if they wish. Most of our wolves and wolfdogs enjoy drinking from their splash tubs (despite the existence of their aforementioned water buckets), or jumping in and splashing around. Only a few of the rescues will actually sit or lay down in them, but as long as they have the option to stand in the water to cool off, they serve their intended purpose. To ensure optimal care for our rescues, each enclosure's splash tub is scrubbed clean on a weekly basis to prevent algae growth and remove mud, and then refilled with fresh, cold water.

At this point in time, splash tubs are a temporary and cost-effective solution for beating the heat, until we can install functional in-ground ponds into every enclosure. Currently, a handful of enclosures do have in-ground pond features, but the majority of them are non-functioning due to issues associated with age, or damages that have occurred over time. Thankfully, one of our major goals for the next year is to build and install

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New Guinea Singing Dog, Bowie, checks out his Summer Cooler enrichment treat

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in-ground ponds inside every enclosure, providing the animals with a much larger wading, splashing, or swimming space, and allowing us to retire the splash tubs for good! Best of all, these ponds will be built with both filling and draining in mind, which will save us time by allowing us to complete these tasks without having to supervise each animal, as we currently do (to ensure our sneaky rescues don't try to steal and eat our hoses!).

We want the ponds to be as natural, cost-effective, and aesthetically pleasing to the eye as possible. We think lots of



High-content wolfdog, Sarkhan, is happy with his watermelon!

For now, we're making do with what we have, but if you want to help with the costs for these features, sponsoring our animals, donating, and spreading the word always helps immensely!

Another example of ways to help our animals cool down (while providing an enriching treat), is by hosting our annual "Summer Coolers" Enrichment event in July. This involves hosting a Facebook Live Stream event in which we pass out watermelons (either whole, in halves, or in quarters) to all of our rescues, while our followers can watch and ask questions from the comfort of their homes! And in case you're wondering, not only is watermelon a great, refreshing treat for these guys, it's one of the best fruity treat options to give your canine family members, especially when it's frozen! For smaller canines, removing the rind and seeds is a good idea, but our larger canines, like our wolves and wolfdogs, know how to handle them! Watermelons are refreshing, full of moisture, antioxidants, vitamins, and fiber, so as well as cooling off our furry friends, it's super a healthy option. In fact, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) actually considers watermelon to be a superfood! There are pictures on our website from previous years' watermelon enrichment events, and you'll see our animals absolutely love it! For anyone that might have missed this year's event, you can tune in during July of next year for the Summer Coolers event specifically, though we have several of these enrichment live streams hosted throughout the year. In addition, you can participate by donating toward the purchase of various enrichment items needed for these events, by sharing the Live Stream with friends and family, and by tuning in and asking us questions during these events!

One of the most exciting things we do to help keep the rescues cool is offering them a wide variety of frozen enrichment items. There is always room for more enrichment, and everyone loves participating (especially the animals!). When it comes to creating enrichment meant to withstand the summer

heat, our team members get super creative, often coming up with new and exciting treats for the canines, since these will usually be eaten before they have a chance to melt. A huge favorite is chicken feet frozen into a cube of bone broth. For our larger animals, frozen chicken parts, frozen bones, and frozen game meat are big enrichment items that the animals can chew

our animals will enjoy them much more than they enjoy the splash tubs, as they'll look more natural to the environment (and therefore be less scary to some of our more nervous and fearful rescues), be constructed in areas of the enclosures that are already shaded, and be much larger.



Arctic wolf, Flurry, makes an escape with his Summer Cooler treat

on and cool off with for hours! For some of our smaller animals, like the foxes and New Guinea singing dogs, we'll use smaller ice cube trays for freezing similar items. All of our animals can get frozen peanut butter treats, blended fruits and vegetables frozen in coconut oil (a healthy and yummy treat), and occasionally frozen cheese!

Outside of food-specific enrichment, we can also offer our rescues large blocks of ice, which can be placed directly into their splash tubs (helping them to last longer inside cold water than they would on the ground), or on the concrete floor of their cave houses. For smaller animals, we might even offer them a plastic kiddie pool full of regular-sized ice cubes, which provides an experience that is a bit different from swimming in a splash tub. We can also soak and freeze things like rope toys (only for animals that we already know can safely play with these types of items), and allow them to be chewed on. For an extra special treat, we might soak these items in a bone broth rather than plain water, or other similar liquids. Lastly, the use of sprinklers, strategically placed outside of an enclosure (where it can't be grabbed and destroyed by our rescues) is another fun option for beating the heat!

As you can see, it can be hard to cool off a thick-coated canine,

especially if they are hands-off like many of our wolves and wolfdogs, but by supplying them with things like constant drinking water, splash tubs, and a variety of cold enrichment, we can combat the elements and also provide them with fun activities to alleviate midday boredom! We do our best to keep our animals (and staff) cool and hydrated during the day, as everyone being in prime condition is vital for safety. It's a bonus that it all ends up being fun for everybody!

For those of you at home with pets of your own, make sure your fur-babies are staying cool this season, and maybe try some of our tricks! If you'd like more information on any of the enrichment items or activities mentioned above, or if you'd like to share some of your ideas with us, reach out by phone or email! We'd love to hear from you.

MEET OUR VOLUNTEER OF THE DECADE

MIKE BUDD

Many successful organizations have at least one person who goes largely unnoticed by the general public, but who is critical to how well the organization functions.

Mike Budd is Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary's unsung hero.

For 13 years Mike has been a fixture at the sanctuary, quietly doing many different tasks, volunteering his time to help us achieve our goals.

From making runs to Albuquerque (or just about anywhere else) to pick-up food donations for our animals, completing shopping trips for necessary materials and supplies, to handmaking signs for each of our rescues, doing the bulk of the landscaping maintenance, and a zillion other things, Mike has been an invaluable asset for our team, guests, and rescues.

The team wants to recognize and thank Mike for his reliability, kindness, attentiveness, and hard work, improving our little sanctuary in the desert nearly every day.

From our entire crew,
Thank you, Mike!

PLAYING HER CARDS RIGHT

an intern project by **Erin McDonough**

When I first arrived at Wild Spirit, I was given a variety of different projects that previous interns had done as inspiration for my own. They ranged from creating course curriculums for elementary students to creating children's books centered around one of our rescues. As soon as I saw that artistic projects were allowed, I immediately jumped on board and began brainstorming ideas.

Despite my science-based career path, ever since I was really young, I've always loved drawing, specifically animals. It allows me time to just turn my brain off and create something that I can be proud of. Coincidentally, when I was a kid, I was also a huge fan of card collecting games such as Yu-gi-oh and Pokémon. I never really used them for anything, but it was always fun to see the different pictures on the cards and what cool attacks or powers they had. This is where I drew most of the inspiration for my project. Since us interns and staff members work with these animals every day, we grow very familiar with their behavior and eccentric traits; however, other people who are just visiting for the day don't know them as well. So, I thought it would be fun to make trading cards based on several of our rescues and give them "attacks" and "weaknesses" which could show off some of the inside jokes that the staff and interns throw around most days.

Some of these jokes are a bit more obvious like Bono's "Tripod Tornado" or Arya's "Underbite Chomp," but for Flicker's chosen weakness, which is simply "men," this is alluding to the fact that any time a male rescue walks by her enclosure, Flicker immediately becomes very excited, trotting by the fence

and wagging her tail like a girl who just saw a cute boy she liked. Similarly, Kabbalah's strength is "Good Sits" because he has daily training while he is fed. During training, the staff member feeding Kabbalah will give him specific signals that mean sit, lay down, or touching a specific area of the fence, and will reward him with his breakfast. This training is able to engage Kabbalah and provide him with some enrichment while also finding a fun way to give him his meal, thus making him extremely proficient at good sits.

I wanted a way to showcase these more nuanced behaviors for people other than those who work here, and also be able to do something with my artistic nature. Trading cards were a perfect way to combine these two qualities and allowed me to draw some of our wonderful rescues! Other than their attacks and weaknesses, further information about the rescue is included on each of their cards, including their birth date, sex, and what their species is. Since there's limited space on the cards, each species is represented by a small icon in the top right corner. I was inspired by how Pokémon cards have the Pokémon "type" in the upper right corner and thought it would be fun to also design icons for each of our species as well.

Through my months of being an intern at Wild Spirit, I have learned countless new pieces of information about our rescues and through this project have gotten to know all of them better. I'm eternally grateful for the experiences I have gathered here as an intern and I'm even more glad that other people will be able to see these cards and enjoy them as well.



CREATING TWO ENRICHMENT

AN INTERN PROJECT BY KENNEDY DiSANTO

One aspect of being an intern with Wild Spirit is coming up with and executing an intern project that runs the length of our stay at the sanctuary. The introduction to this project is very broad which allows us interns to delve deeper into our areas of interest. For some, it has been on the design side, creating art that can be sold in our Gift Shop. For others, this involves helping the Building and Maintenance team design and build enclosures for our animals. As someone very interested in animal behavior, enrichment, and training opportunities for animals in captivity, I decided to focus my project on designing specific enrichment items for our rescues. The basic premise of my project was to hang either tires or boxes filled with various enrichment materials from tree branches in the wolfdogs' enclosures. Hanging these items at or above head-level allows our animals to practice hunting and foraging techniques to acquire the enrichment inside the box or tire. This encourages their natural behaviors and also their overall curiosity. It also adds fun, energy-expending activities to their day to keep them from getting into a repetitive schedule that could lead to boredom and negative stereotypic behaviors.



High-content wolfdog, Kaya, tears into enrichment while her habitat-mate, low-content male, Obi, watches.

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The enrichment items I've elected to use can hold not only food enrichment (including chicken drumsticks or feet, hotdogs, cheese sticks and various other foods that add variety to their diets), but also scent enrichment, such as non-toxic perfumes and herbs (including mint). I chose to administer this enrichment activity to a few enclosures every Tuesday and Friday. Since we normally feed our animals on Tuesdays, I provide the rescues with scent enrichment on those days, and since we use Fridays as a fasting day, I provide the animals with food enrichment instead. Since beginning this project, I have rotated box and tire enrichment every other week and have packed them with things like hay, paper, and other materials that added to our rescues' experience. So far, scent enrichment has been given primarily to animals who are more food motivated to prevent any scuffles between companions for the snacks. Animals like Cinder love scent rolling around in the contents of his tire. This is a behavior that you may see in your own dogs when they mark their scent by rubbing or urinating on something. In the wild, many species of animals mark their scent to claim territory or resources which is exactly what our animals are doing. For especially territorial animals that tend not to share well, I've provided them with separate enrichment items inside their sub-enclosures. This allows their more apprehensive companions to also experience and enjoy the enrichment without being pushed out of the way or stolen from. For our animals that are a bit older or have physical limitations that make jumping for the enrichment more difficult, I place their boxes or tires on the ground. They still benefit from this enrichment as they still have to break into the box or reach into the tire to discover its contents, and this still promotes that natural foraging behavior mentioned earlier.



2 year-old high-content wolfdog, Sarkhan, loves his enrichment!



Animal Care interns, Bell Hansen (left), and Erin McDonough (right) help Kennedy prepare enrichment boxes for some lucky rescues.



Kennedy hangs a box in Sarkhan and Katniss' enclosure.

The last aspect of the project I wanted to include was a standard operating procedure manual so that future interns and the Wild Spirit team could easily replicate my work and continue offering our animals fun and different enrichment opportunities. So far, the rescues have really enjoyed receiving these items and it is really fulfilling to see them behaving instinctually just as they would in their natural habitats. It has brought me closer to these animals and I have a newfound love and respect for them and their wild counterparts. Having a structured project during our time as interns has been really beneficial and has allowed me to learn more about working with captive-held animals in a manner that will help me moving forward in my career endeavors.



Scents are a valuable tool in enrichment, and while female mid-content wolfdog, Katniss, was too shy to tear into her own box, she did enjoy what habitat-mate, Sarkhan, dumped on the ground.

BIG PACK IN THE SKY



KATRINA

Katrina was one of five domestic dogs that Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary rescued from a shelter in 2009 after they were misidentified as wolfdogs. Lovingly nicknamed the “NOLAs” (because they were rescued from a shelter in New Orleans, LA), the pack was originally made up of five siblings: Goldie, Saint, Juno, Katrina, and Azteca.

Sadly, as the years went on, our NOLA pack grew older, and in 2019 and 2020, we said goodbye to brother Saint and sister Goldie, leaving Juno, Katrina, and Azteca until June of 2021, when Katrina joined her siblings in our Big Pack in the Sky.

Before her passing, Katrina was the bravest of the remaining siblings, and her bold presence gave Juno and Katrina a lot of confidence. Her passing was a little sudden, but not unexpected. In the fall of 2020, Katrina and Juno were both diagnosed with large abdominal masses,

but due to age, neither of the girls were candidates for surgery. Fortunately, the masses did not seem to seriously impact their quality of life, and both girls continued to thrive for months following their diagnoses.

Unfortunately, this changed quite abruptly for Katrina when, in June of 2021, we began to see her decline rather rapidly, to the point that she no longer wanted to take her medications, eat, or socialize with human caretakers or her sisters. It was then that we knew she needed our assistance, and surrounded by the love of Juno, Azteca, and her human “family,” we helped sweet Katrina across the Rainbow Bridge.

Her sisters were given the chance to say goodbye after we assisted Katrina in passing, and we know they will always think of her fondly, as will the rest of our team.



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For more information and application visit
SEETHEWOLVES.COM/JOIN-US

Re-Homing can be AN ACT OF LOVE

The months between our last Howling Reporter and now have been filled with non-stop activity for the Wild Spirit Team, with each day bringing something new and exciting to the table. Between daily habitat upgrades, and the reconstruction of our tour path in preparation of our 2021 Grand Re-opening, we've certainly been staying busy! More exciting than any of that, however, was the arrival of not one, not two, but four new rescues! Like many of our recent intakes, they all share a common theme: Despite coming to live at Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary, every one of these animals was incredibly loved and well cared for, but sadly, unforeseen circumstances created a situation in which their owners could no longer keep them.

When it comes to the rescue world—whether we're talking about dog and cat shelters, farm animal rescues, or even wild animal sanctuaries—for many years, there has existed a strongly pushed rhetoric that villainizes owners who choose to give up a beloved family pet, regardless of their reasons. And while sometimes the decision to re-home an animal is made based on seemingly selfish reasons, this certainly isn't always the case, and to create this stigma only serves to prevent owners from making an already difficult decision.

In the wolfdog world, this often results in owners that are afraid to reach out to qualified facilities for assistance, which leads to them making even worse decisions with regard to the well-being of their animals. For example, an owner who is afraid to reach out to a sanctuary for placement due to the fear of being judged and scolded might instead post their animal on Craigslist to be placed with someone even less experienced. Or they might simply set them loose into the wild, believing they'll survive just fine on their own (which is seldom the case). Worst of all, some owners will simply elect to have their animals euthanized, rather than face the criticism that often comes with re-homing.

As you can see, none of these decisions lead to the betterment of the animal's life, which is our ultimate goal here at Wild Spirit. That's why I'd like to take a moment today to tell you about our four newest rescues and how they came to be at the sanctuary, and use their stories to debunk the myth that anyone who chooses to give up an animal is selfish. Hopefully by doing this, we can continue to bridge the gap often felt between owners and sanctuaries, and show people that in always putting the animals first, Wild Spirit is a safe place to turn to in times of need, whatever those needs may be.

So without further ado, I hope you will join us in welcoming our four newest wolfdogs to the Wild Spirit family!

Mowgli

In April of 2021, we received an intake request for 3-year-old high-content wolfdog, Mowgli, who was living as a privately owned pet on a cattle farm in northern Colorado. Like many of our more recent rescues, Mowgli was legally owned, loved, and well cared for by his owners, who had experience with not only wolfdogs, but a number of other exotic animals as well. Specifically, Mowgli's owners had worked with big cats, bears, and other species in a zoological setting prior to engaging in wolfdog ownership, making them more prepared than the average person for what caring for an animal like Mowgli might entail. As a result, they were equipped with a large enclosure constructed out of high-gauge chain link and enough space to support not only Mowgli, but his companion, a low-content male wolfdog who acted as a vital support system for Mowgli since he was a puppy. In addition, they were in a position to provide both animals with adequate socialization, a high-quality diet, and all their necessary vet care.

Unfortunately, as Mowgli entered into sexual maturity, his behaviors began to shift dramatically. For example, he became increasingly

unpredictable, sensitive to certain types of touch, and altogether difficult to interact with safely. In addition, he killed another family pet that lived in the enclosure next to him, which solidified his owners' decision to seek out sanctuary placement.

As you can see, despite the fact that Mowgli's owners were in a unique position to provide their pets with legal and experienced care, there was no way that they could have known for certain how much Mowgli's behaviors might shift as he grew into maturity, especially with the level of socialization they were providing. With other animals, including domestics, sometimes sexual maturity brings about little to no changes, while other times, the transitions are extremely dramatic. This is an issue that could be experienced by any number of animal owners across the board—not just wolfdog owners—and depending on a variety of other factors, it's something that could make or break an animal's living situation. In Mowgli's case, his family had a young child and other pets to think about, and while they could have elected to keep Mowgli for the rest of

his life, that decision would not have been what was best for Mowgli, his owners and their family, or the other animals living on their property.

At the end of the day, Mowgli's family made the incredibly difficult decision to re-home him, and we cannot stress enough how much this decision, in our eyes, was not a selfish one. It was a decision that allowed Mowgli to join the Wild Spirit family where he continues to be safe and secure, but where he can thrive under the care of people that are even more prepared to manage his difficulties. All in all, Mowgli continues to enjoy the same quality of life he once did, but in an environment where he is less of a threat to human or animal safety. Best of all, his owners still reach out to check in on how he's doing, and continue to share their happiness and appreciation for how he's adjusting.

Since arriving at the sanctuary in April, just a few days before his 3rd birthday, Mowgli has been settling in slowly but surely. From the beginning, he has clearly demonstrated all of the behaviors his owners were experiencing, and he has shown a strong distaste for most of our team, frequently whimpering and pressing up against the fence for pets, then growling when someone approaches. Thankfully, he and I have shared a close bond since the day he arrived, which has made caring for him a little bit easier. Because he will allow me to pet him inside or outside of the enclosure, I was even able to remove the collar he arrived with after a couple of weeks, despite his extreme touch-sensitivity, and hand-sedate him for his first vet visit. While under sedation, Mowgli received a full physical exam, routine blood work and vaccinations, a dental exam, and a neuter, which we hope will help to alleviate some of his more intense behaviors.

Mowgli was recently paired with high-content female wolfdog, Agana, and the two can often be seen lying next to each other in the shade of their enclosure. We are grateful to see both animals coming together and forming new bonds after the losses of their previous companions, and we hope they will continue to provide a sense of comfort for one another as time goes by. With Mowgli being such a young animal, he should be with Wild Spirit for a number of years to come, and we're grateful that his owners trusted us to give him an amazing life for the rest of his days. We understand that their decision was not an easy one, but we hope they can rest easier knowing that he is extremely loved, just as much as he was when he was living in their care.



MOWGLI



KATNISS



SARKHAN

Sarkhan & Katniss

The story of our next two rescues is quite similar to Mowgli's. 2-year-old high-content wolfdog, Sarkhan, and his companion, 7-year-old mid-content wolfdog, Katniss, were also legally owned by loving and well-qualified owners who had been both raising and rescuing wolfdogs for nearly 20 years. In fact, they had a total of 11 animals at the time that Sarkhan and Katniss were rescued (including one foster), all of which had safe and secure enclosures, adequate diets and vet care, companionship, and ample human socialization—so much so, in fact, that several of their animals have been used for Ambassador work, going out into public to interact with people and teach them about wolves and wolfdogs (similar to what Wild Spirit once did with our own Ambassador Animal program).

Unfortunately, just like Mowgli, Sarkhan also experienced an extreme shift in personality upon entering into sexual maturity, and despite the fact that he was raised with an incredible amount of love and socialization, he became increasingly aggressive toward his owners, acting out with such intensity that it became impossible for them to care for him—or Katniss—safely. Before deciding to give him up, the couple racked their brains trying to figure out what might be triggering his behaviors and went to great lengths attempting to trouble-shoot and resolve the issues; unfortunately, after months of trial and error, nothing seemed to work, so they made the difficult decision to re-home him to Wild Spirit.

In addition, because Sarkhan was so bonded to Katniss, the couple asked if we would take her as well, allowing them to remain together for life. Naturally, we agreed, and in May of 2021, we made the trip from New Mexico to Alabama to pick them up and bring them home.

Upon arriving at the couple's home, we were introduced to the two wolfdogs, who demonstrated very different comfort levels around people. Sarkhan, for example, was very confident in our presence, but immediately began to display the aggressive behaviors we were warned about, approaching the fence line with hackles raised and snarling loudly. Katniss, in comparison, seemed shy but curious, electing to keep a healthy distance from the members of our team.

Knowing that Sarkhan was so aggressive, we arrived in Alabama with a plan in place—one that involved utilizing our dart gun to safely sedate him prior

to entering into his space. Thankfully, because he was so confident around humans, darting him was a breeze, and within moments we were able to enter the enclosure to place him into a crate and reverse him from the sedatives. Katniss, on the other hand, would not stand still long enough for us to dart her safely, but was quickly caught up without issue and reunited with Sarkhan just moments later. Once both animals were contained, we began our journey back to the sanctuary, where the pair was placed into a massive enclosure and immediately went to greet their new neighbors!

Since arriving at Wild Spirit, Sarkhan has demonstrated varying degrees of outright aggressive displays, which differ depending on who he's interacting with and changes from day to day. Thankfully, due to the often unpredictable nature of working with rescues, we are equipped with not only highly trained team members, but with enclosures that allow us to complete our day-to-day tasks with even the most dangerous individuals. In Sarkhan's case, for example, his enclosure is equipped with a "shift-pen" or "lock-out" where he can be transitioned for short periods of time, allowing any member of the team to clean the space without him being in there. We also possess equipment that would allow us to safely sedate Sarkhan or Katniss if necessary, which provides greater opportunities for emergency planning—something that most owners with highly dangerous animals aren't able to prepare for in the same ways.

In the coming months, both Sarkhan and Katniss will meet with Wild Spirit's amazing veterinary partner to have full work-ups completed. Sarkhan will also undergo a neuter surgery, which we hope will help to address some of his less-desirable behaviors. (Thankfully, companion Katniss is already spayed, so there is no reason to rush, as the two of them cannot breed.) Giving each of our new rescues more time to settle in before the stress associated with a vet visit will make the whole process much easier, and thankfully, because I've been working with Sarkhan on safe and appropriate "through-the-fence" contact, I should be able to easily hand-sedate him in preparation for his surgery. Being able to do this is much less stressful on an animal than darting or a capture (and much safer for human beings), which is always a major goal for our team.

Like Mowgli's owners, Sarkhan and Katniss's former family members both regularly reach out to check on how the pair is doing, and they are always available to answer any questions we might have, or to simply allow us to pick their brains about new behaviors we may be seeing. In addition, they have even made financial contributions to their care at Wild Spirit (something that is never required, and rarely done, but always appreciated).

When considering that Sarkhan was once so social that he walked in a local parade of 3,000 people and worked as an Ambassador Animal, I have no doubt that seeing him transform into an unsafe and nearly untouchable animal was an incredibly difficult thing for his owners to experience. And while the couple probably could have elected to keep both of their animals, in the end, they knew that finding them a new home was the best choice they could make. And as the person that goes to owners' homes, loads up their animals and asks them to sign their rights to the animals over to the sanctuary, watches them say goodbye with tears in their eyes, then drives away... I can say with certainty that the decision is rarely ever easy.

Kirito

Last but not least is 9-year-old low-content wolfdog, Kirito, who was previously owned as a pet in North Carolina. Sadly, Kirito has been owned by a number of different people and re-homed several times. According to the person we got him from, he was severely neglected in one of his previous homes, which prompted her to take him in. Thankfully, as his new owner, she was much more willing to give him the love and care that he needed, even going so far as to begin treating his heartworms—a condition that he likely had for years in his previous home and that can be fatal—and raising the funds needed to provide the best care that she could for him. Sadly, despite all her best efforts, Kirito was

still a handful, demonstrating a number of undesirable behaviors that made him a complicated pet to house, especially with her other animals.

Despite being more dog than wolf and incredibly social, Kirito demonstrated same-sex aggression, meaning he had a strong distaste for other male dogs and would try to attack every time he came into contact with them. (Sadly, his owner's other dogs were male, which made their living situation incredibly stressful, and also potentially risky.) He was also an escape artist, capable of climbing out of 8-foot-high fences or digging his way out of enclosures without ground covering. He was also known to resource-guard things like food, bones, and toys from other animals and from his owner, making him a safety risk. With all these factors combined, Kirito simply wasn't the right fit for his owner, despite her best intentions to give him a better life than the one he had before. Knowing that if she kept him, she would be compromising the safety of herself and her other dogs, in addition to Kirito's safety, she made the difficult decision to re-home him.



Fortunately, Kirito's owner was willing to go above and beyond to ensure that he found the absolute perfect home. Not only did she do her research on Wild Spirit, going so far as to request photos and videos of our enclosures to ensure he would have adequate space to run and play, and not be able to escape through digging or climbing, she was also prepared to organize a fundraiser that would cover the costs associated with transporting him from North Carolina to New Mexico, should Wild Spirit agree to take him. Interestingly enough, a fundraiser never happened. Instead, because we were already planning a trip to Alabama to pick up Sarkhan and Katniss, Kirito's owner insisted on driving him from North Carolina to Alabama to drop him off in person, ensuring he would arrive there safely and with someone he knew and was comfortable with to aid in his transition into new hands. Last but not least, she even provided us with his remaining doses of heartworm medication, which can be quite costly.

All of these decisions show that in his case, Kirito was well loved and had someone deeply committed to his overall well-being, even when most of his previous owners had not. Even now, several months after his placement with Wild Spirit, Kirito's past owner still continues to reach out for updates and check in on how he's doing! Due to his sweet and loving personality, he has quickly become a staff favorite, and he is so tiny that it's hard to resist falling in love with

his cute little face! In addition, Kirito is great on leash, so he has been able to take walks around the compound and get his own "tour" of the sanctuary. Best of all, he was recently moved into an enclosure with mid-content wolfdog, Yue, who seems to be the perfect match for him!

At the end of the day, the decision to re-home an animal is rarely an easy one to make, whether that decision involves a dog, cat, or any other type of pet—including wolfdogs. Life is unpredictable and filled with the possibility of inevitable change. People get new jobs, get sick, or pass away. Animals may develop health or behavioral issues that are unmanageable depending on their owner's circumstances, resources, or overall level of experience. In addition, many owners—like Kirito's—are also rescuers, taking in animals with uncertain backstories, and one thing we at Wild Spirit can attest to is the fact that when taking in a rescue, there are never guarantees. And while sad tales certainly do exist—tales that support the "selfish owner" narrative—those stories aren't true for everyone. Not all animals are abandoned after they stop being cute little puppies; nor because the animal got too old or because the family got a new pet or had a baby. And even in these types of circumstances, without knowing the full story, it's not our place to assume that even those reasons are purely selfish.

The point is, some stories—like the ones listed above—are about animals that are loved more than anything, but that still aren't the right fit for their families. And in those instances, sometimes the least selfish thing a person can do is let go of their pet in order to give it a chance at a life where it can thrive; a life in a safe and suitable environment where it can be provided with the same amount of love and care, just from different people.

So, for anyone out there that has been faced with this difficult decision, or who may be finding themselves in such a position right now, please know that you're not alone in your struggles and you aren't a bad person or a bad owner if you choose to let your animal go. And know that Wild Spirit is here to offer you a safe space to turn to, whether you're looking for advice, resources, or placement. Even if we can't help provide your animal with a home, we will do everything in our power to connect you with someone who can. Because if we want to make an impact on animals beyond those physically in our care, we need to bridge the gap between private owners and the rescue community, and prove that we can be trusted to provide these animals with the same amount of love that their owners once did—and that in many ways, they always, always will.

If you've been moved by the stories of any of our four new rescues, please consider sponsoring them! Your annual donation supports the care of our rescues by assisting in covering the costs of vet care, medications, enrichment, enclosure improvements, and so much more!



High-content wolfdog, Draco, loves his neighbors, Sarkhan and Katniss.



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High-Content wolfdog, Mowgli can be sweet, if he wants to be! See him on page 16!

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High-Content wolfdog, Draco, snatching up his Summer Cooler enrichment!