



The HOWLING REPORTER

WINTER EDITION • DECEMBER, 2021

9 YEAR-OLD FEMALE COYOTE, YUNI

IN THIS ISSUE

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2022 SPONSORSHIP CHANGES

Dear Howling Supporters,

We're making some changes to our sponsorship program in the coming new year.

The Howling Reporter is going to return to the twice a year schedule, so expect it in May and November. We tried to do this quarterly in 2021, but the rising cost of postage, printing four issues, and creating the content make it too difficult to continue that frequently. The content will all still be created by our staff, volunteers, and interns, and each issue will be at least 20 pages.

We're also changing one of our sponsorship rewards. Instead of the customized, 8.5" x 11" sponsorship certificate, we're going to send a 8.5" x 5.5" certificate that no longer has the sponsor's name. You will still have the option to also receive the 2022 3" x 4" magnet for your selected rescue!

Finally, we've brought back the "Let the Stars Align" sponsorship, which is a fun way to select a critter to sponsor, and receive a certificate and magnet, for only \$99!

We're making these changes in order to reduce our costs, but still provide our Howling Supporters with something that shows our gratitude for choosing to help us in our mission.

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We wish you happy holidays, however you celebrate, and we'll see you in 2022!

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WOLVES

IN FOLKLORE & MYTHOLOGY

Storybook wolves have a reputation. Think *The Three Little Pigs*, or *Little Red Riding Hood*. The big, scary wolf is always the villain, the hunted, the thief - surely you've heard it all before. Simple children's book villains, and easy characters to portray with sharp teeth and haunting eyes. A creature who moves at dawn and dusk, slinking through the woods and stalking their prey with an intelligent, fierce pack. Despite stories like these, and sinister depictions of wolves with bloody fangs and piercing yellow eyes, the folklore stories of wolves from hundreds to thousands of years ago, often tell a different story.

Wolves feature quite predominantly in many myths, legends, and folklore from North American and European cultures, and many other places around the world. Symbolism embodied by wolves is vast and compelling, and no other animal captures or evokes feeling quite like the wolf. Not many animals have as much symbolism in our language - we speak of "the big bad wolf," children who "cry wolf," when ravenous, we "wolf" down our food, no other animal is a "wolf in sheep's clothing," and when adapting to unsightly behaviors, we say we're "among the wolves". These sayings and idioms portray the character we are familiar with: a villain. Something ravenous, sneaky, and dangerous. Although, if we look back, into tales and legends about wolves that are meant to teach us a lesson, rather than scare children away from lying (Boy Who Cried Wolf), we'll find something different.

Wolves feature predominantly in Native American folklore; something that is still heavily influential in modern day art and literature. The relationship between the people and wolves is almost sacred, but oftentimes used in ways to tell stories of creation or teach lessons about life. The Lakota have a story about a woman who was injured while travelling alone, who was found and taken in by a wolf pack. The pack nurtured and cared for her, and while with them, she learned their ways. Once healed and able to return to her tribe, she brought her new knowledge with her, knowing before other people when danger was approaching, or when a hunt was near. This helped her people prosper, and she learned to be more in tune with herself and her surroundings.

Another interesting story is a Cherokee tale about a dog and a wolf. The story starts with the dog up high in the mountains, and the wolf sleeping comfortably by a settlement fire. When

winter would come, the dog would race down the mountain, unable to stand the cold, to be by the fire. The dog would chase the wolf from the fire, and the wolf would find his way up into the mountains to take the dog's spot. The dog quite enjoyed the warm fire and the settlement, and the wolf found himself enjoying the mountains. The mountains suited him so much, and he prospered. That is, until he grew hungry and was forced to venture to the settlement to kill off livestock for food. He did this again and again, until the people of the settlement followed him back up the mountain, the dog helping guide them, and killed the wolf. The wolf's brothers heard of this tragedy and brought revenge to the settlement, scaring the people badly until they became afraid to ever hurt a wolf again.

There are many, many stories in Native American folklore that feature wolves, but there are other cultures that have similar ideals and relationships to wolves, including the Greeks and the Romans. There are many stories in these cultures as well, but the most popular and recognizable is the Greco-Roman myth about the female "She-Wolf of Rome," also known as the "Wolf Mother". Artwork and modern depictions of her are often a grey wolf that is nursing two human infants, known as Romulus and Remus. According to her legend, she was vital in the founding of Rome, the city actually based on the story of the she-wolf.

The story goes that the god of war, Mars, was the uncle to two boys, Romulus and Remus, who were next in line for the throne. He saw the babies as a threat to his crown and threw the twins into a river, hoping to drown them. The twins washed down the river, but were rescued by a female wolf, who pulled them from the water and nursed them back to health. She then nourished and cared for them, helping them grow strong. Eventually the twins would go on to found the city of Rome, but Romulus would kill Remus due to a disagreement about where to found the city. This story is why the she-wolf is seen as the reason for the building of Rome. The she-wolf is often associated with power, which made her a popular tale throughout the Roman empire; she also represents nourishment, protection, and fertility, as her maternal care is how the twins survived.

This narrative is one that attests to the bond humans feel toward wolves, nothing showing that bond quite as well as a caring mother wolf nursing lost twin boys. There are many versions of this story, one version being Mowgli from Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* series, about an orphan boy raised in the same manner. Romulus and Remus happen to be one of the most recognizable of the mother wolf tales, but legend of the wolf and its relationship with humans doesn't stop there.

Arguably one of the more well known mythological wolves is Fenrir, a great wolf of Norse legend. Fenrir is a gigantic, destructive wolf born to the mischievous god, Loki. Fenrir and his two siblings, the world serpent Jörmungandr, and the goddess

Hel, were prophesied to help bring about the end of the world, a chaos known as Ragnarok. Fenrir himself was prophesied to kill the Norse All-Father god, Odin. Not because of Fenrir being a gigantic wolf, or being evil, but just simply because that is what was written.

Fenrir was raised by the gods to be controlled, given specifically to the god of law and war, Týr, to be kept in check. Despite Fenrir's future, Týr grew to care for Fenrir and they became close friends. Fenrir grew at an astonishing pace, to the point where the gods decided he needed to be chained up to be controlled. To achieve this, the gods had to trick Fenrir, telling him that binding him up was a game, and a test of his strength. The first two tries to bound Fenrir lead to him breaking free of his bonds. For their third attempt, they had dwarves forge the strongest chain ever built, which resembled a light and soft ribbon instead.

At this point, Fenrir became suspicious of the gods' games, especially when they presented him with the light and soft bonds, and he refused to be tied up again. The only way he would allow himself to be bound, would be if one of the gods laid their hand in his mouth as a sign of good faith. Of course, no one agreed, as their hand would surely be bitten off once Fenrir discovered the bonds to be inescapable. Knowing what had to be done, Týr accepted this oath, and placed his hand in Fenrir's mouth. Sure enough, when Fenrir could not escape the bonds, he swallowed Týr's hand whole. Contained and betrayed, Fenrir was transported to desolate plains, tied to stone, and had a sword placed in his jaws. Fenrir howled and cried, and

as foamy saliva flowed from his mouth with his ceaseless crying, a river began to form - dubbed Expectations. And there Fenrir remained.

Similar to many Norse legends, the prophecy of Fenrir was self-fulfilling. The gods tricked Fenrir and bound him away, leading to his resentment of the All-Father, Odin, and his eventual escape and taking of revenge during Ragnarok, or "the end of the world". Though many people view the large wolf Fenrir as a symbol of evil,



in Norse mythology he is actually regarded as a symbol of strength, ferocity, destiny, and inevitability. Fenrir is often viewed as someone who was wrongfully chained and locked away out of fear of him fulfilling his destiny, which in turn, forced him to fulfill it. In many modern depictions of Fenrir, he's a dark wolf seen breaking free of his chains. Due to the fear of Fenrir's size and potential fate, rather than teaching him about his fate, or to be kind, the gods tricked him and locked him away out of fear.

There are many stories that give us reason to view wolves in different lights, and our history tells us that we project our fears of the unknown and the violence of nature onto powerful, untamed, wolves. We no longer depend on the symbiotic relationships of hunters and wolves,

and therefore, we see them as dangerous. Of course, wolves can be dangerous, but no other animal is as symbolically "big and bad" or as clearly negative as the wolf. Despite this, there are so many stories from so many cultures across the world that show wolves as intelligent, caring creatures, often wronged by humans or mistaken for an evil they are not.

Atticus Follows His Heart

A story for children, written by Shaina Miller & illustrated by Tiffany Thurow

Atticus lived in what he believed was the most beautiful place in the world. Up in the mountains lay his village, where the people loved deeply and lived freely. Mother nature was his most favorite friend, and each morning he said hello to the foxes and rabbits who came out from their burrows in time to see the sun rise. He took in the smell of the season's wildflowers and embraced the cool wind on his skin as he looked beyond at this mysterious world he called home.



Of all the wondrous things mother nature had in store, his favorite sound was that of the wolves he could hear in the distance. So full of emotion, he always thought, there were sounds of celebration, sorrow, and hunger. Atticus longed to watch the wolves up close and to be able to understand their songs more. The people of the village stayed away from the wolves, for they were said to be vicious and dangerous.

"Humans have no place in wolf territory," Atticus's parents would say each time he asked why he wasn't allowed to see the wolves. "I promise I won't get too close, I just want to learn their songs," Atticus would protest, while getting tucked in for bed.

Atticus's mother would say, "The wolves are dangerous, unrelenting creatures. If we are not careful they could destroy us all in one night. Do not go near them, they are not our friends".

Atticus didn't understand his mother's words, for he thought all of nature was meant to be friends. Little did he know he was about to prove his parents, and his entire village, wrong.

One night when the moon was full and bright, Atticus snuck out of bed and followed a particularly eerie song from the wolves at the bottom of the mountain. Atticus knew his village and surrounding forests well, but at the bottom of the mountain things became dark and he no longer recognized where he was.

As the song of the wolves grew louder and the creatures of the night began stirring around him, Atticus started missing the warmth of his bed and the comfort of his parents' presence.

"Maybe mum and dad were right, I shouldn't have come out here alone. I'm never going to find my way back." Atticus said to himself as he strained to see through the infinity of darkness.

Suddenly the animals he was so fond of observing from his mountain became something out of his village's horror stories. The owls seemed to be warning him of the things surrounding him, just out of his sight. Mysterious glowing eyes shown through the spaces in the dense forest that made a shiver run down his spine.

Then, terrifyingly close to him, he heard howls and the cries of animals. But this was not a song of joy or even the song of a wolf on a hunt, but of a pack expressing deep pain and frantic worry. A moment later he heard a cry so piercingly sad that he felt his heart break in an instant. Without thinking Atticus broke into a sprint, running as fast as he could towards the howling. When the song grew louder, Atticus approached with careful caution as a small wolf, no bigger than a pup, was sitting against a giant oak crying up at the moon.

"You must be who the other wolves are howling for," Atticus said as the wolf pup looked up to him with bright,

scared eyes. "We need to get you home - do you think we could find your pack together?" The wolf pup seemed hesitant, but had a look of relief on his face as he stood up and they both started walking towards the cries in the distance.



All of the sounds and sights Atticus was so frightened of before were less intimidating now that he had a friend by his side. The little pup's nose snuffled at the air, and his ears twitched with the sounds around them. He seemed calmer with Atticus, and Atticus found himself trusting in the pup's instincts. If the pup wasn't afraid anymore, maybe the boy didn't need to be either. Soon the forest felt alive with magical charm again, and he was embracing all the nature that was around him. The full moon lit up the shadows that had scared him before, and those glowing eyes in the dark were just owls, perched in trees. At last Atticus and the wolf pup saw the scurrying of wolves in a nearby meadow. The pup instantly ran towards his family and the mourning howls turned into rejoicing songs of calm.

With the pup safely returned to his family, Atticus realized how much further he was from his own home, and although he desperately wanted to return to his mother and father, he did not know the way. Now Atticus was in the same position as the wolf pup, except he didn't have anyone to help guide him back.

As Atticus wondered what would become of him out in the forest alone, the wolf pack slowly made their way out of the meadow and into the woods beyond. Instead of continuing their journey, the wolves stopped to look back at Atticus, and waited.

"Are you trying to tell me to follow you?" Atticus whispered, taking a few steps forward. When he did so, the wolves began to walk onward and the little pup even stayed back so that he could prance by Atticus's side.

In the distance, Atticus could spot the lights of his village and could hear the calls of his parents and family. *They were out looking for me all this time, too,* he thought to himself. Nearing the edge of the mountain to the trail that would take him back up to his home, he turned and saw the wolf pack behind him. "Thank you friends, I will never be scared whenever you're near," beginning his trek back up the mountain to his parents and his warm bed.

"I'm so proud of you, Atticus, for showing us all the importance of being kind to every creature on this earth," Atticus's mother said later that night as she tucked him into bed. And so every month at the full moon, Atticus and the people of his village make their way to the meadow where Atticus reunited the wolf pup with his pack. They host a fire in the wolves' honor for bringing Atticus home safe that night, and to remind the people of the relationship they now have between themselves and the animals they once feared.



BIG PACK IN THE SKY



POWDER

Senior Arctic wolf, Powder, will be greatly missed by the whole team, but especially by his long-time companion and sister, Sugar. Powder came to Wild Spirit in 2006 at just a few weeks old, along with all his siblings. Even after being raised here by many wonderful Caretakers, Powder was always on the shy side, but had a few Keeper friends who he enjoyed spending time with over the years. He was always known for testing new volunteers and interns by refusing to come take his daily medications from them, even after a few weeks of them spending time trying to earn his trust. He was a gentle and sweet soul who we are all going to miss dearly.



STIGMA

While Stigma may not have been at the sanctuary long, she had a big impact on our team. Affectionately known as "Bean Blossom," this sweet, shy girl settled in quickly to her new life at Wild Spirit, and with her new companion, Kenai. The two made quite the pair and were often seen playing with their neighbors and each other. She quickly became one of our most photogenic animals, always striking a pose for a stunning shot like this one. We are deeply saddened by losing this sweet girl so soon after rescuing her, but are grateful to know she lived in peace, comfort, and with endless love during her time with us.

Seasonal Behavioral Changes

BY BRITTANY MCDONALD

As fall sets in, the days grow shorter, the temperatures begin to drop, and here at Wild Spirit, the Animal Care staff begin to experience noticeable changes in some of the wolves and higher content wolfdogs, indicating that winter is nearly upon us. In some cases, animals that are normally sweet and social begin to demonstrate aggressive territorial displays, actively guarding their resources, companion, or even their space. On the other end of the spectrum, sometimes animals that are normally shy and hands-off become braver, actively seeking out affection from their favorite Caretakers. Whatever the case may be, these shifts in personality and behavior are known as “Seasonal Behavioral Changes,” and they are driven specifically by hormonal fluctuations that take place in the fall and winter—or rather, the months leading up to and throughout the wolf’s breeding season.

“Seasonal Behavioral Changes” are often referred to as “Seasonal Aggression” or “Winter Wolf Syndrome,” but it’s important to note that not all behavioral changes will be aggressive, and this shift is not a syndrome. Regardless of its title, this phenomenon is one of the least talked about aspects of owning (or even working with) wolves and wolfdogs. As a result, new and inexperienced owners are often unprepared for the changes that the season may bring—especially as their animals reach sexual maturity in their 2nd to 4th years—which often results in unexpected incidents involving human or animal safety. In many cases, this leads to owners seeking sanctuary placement due to uncertainty about what they’re experiencing in the first place, and ultimately, whether these changes are lifelong things. In some of the worst cases, these behavioral changes may also lead to owners euthanizing their pets, not knowing that once the season ends, their animals will likely shift back to their “normal” personalities. Even in a professional capacity, these transformations—which can last for months—may mean that drastic changes are needed for our daily routines.

With the season almost upon us, we wanted to take this opportunity to share with our readers some information about the wolf’s breeding season, and what it may have in store for us and our rescues. But before we delve too much into the specifics, it’s important to note that not all wolves and wolfdogs will go through drastic (or even noticeable) shifts during this time of the year, and despite the fact that these changes occur during the “breeding season,” it isn’t only intact (not spayed or neutered) animals that may experience dramatic changes. In fact, any animal (wolf or higher content wolfdog) of any sex can experience extreme shifts as a result of hormonal fluctuations, and for some, these may begin to occur as early as October and as late as March.

In order to explain how this season affects male and female wolves (and higher content wolfdogs) specifically, we’ve listed out what each sex will experience, physiologically, throughout the year.

MALES

While male domestic dogs are able to breed all year round, male wolves (and higher content wolfdogs) are only viable during the months of January through March. As previously mentioned, it is during the months leading up to this time that male wolves’ testosterone levels begin to increase, reaching their peak during the months of December through March. It’s at this point that an animal is the most likely to demonstrate seasonal behavioral shifts, if they’re going to occur at all. Remember, though, that wolves and higher content wolfdogs generally do not reach sexual maturity until between the ages of 2 and 4 years old, meaning that an individual may not go through any shifts for the first few years of their life (which is often why it’s so alarming for owners the first time they witness it). Fortunately, once the breeding season has ended, male testosterone levels will once again begin to drop, and by spring time—just prior to when pups would normally be born—a hormone known as prolactin begins to kick in, inducing parental behavior that peaks in June and usually lasts through September. During this time of the year, testosterone levels are at their lowest, and male wolves (and higher content wolfdogs) are the most good-natured.

FEMALES

Unlike wolves (and higher content wolfdogs), most female domestic dogs will go through a heat cycle twice per year, and are capable of breeding and giving birth to their pups any month of the year, meaning they do not have a specific breeding or birthing “season”. As with male wolves (and higher content wolfdogs), females also experience an annual reproductive cycle that takes place exclusively during the breeding season (January through March). During this time, fluctuating levels of estrogen, progesterone, and prolactin affect the female’s behavior, and may make them more territorial and aggressive, or may cause them to become more clingy and affectionate to those they are most closely bonded with. Following the breeding season, pregnant females will experience a 62- to 63-day gestation period before they will finally give birth. During this time, just as it did with the males, females (even those that are spayed and not pregnant) will begin to experience an increase in parental hormones, resulting in more amicable personalities and accompanying behaviors.

Again, Seasonal Behavioral Changes are not something that will

(Continued on page 12)

High-content female wolfdog, Tehya, is roughly 2 years-old. She lives with high-content male, Cinder. She absolutely loves to play with her neighbor, Kaya, through their shared fenceline.

be observed in every wolf or wolfdog, but for those animals that do experience a shift, some of the most common signs of are:

- A usually sweet, loving animal may start to shy away when you try to give it attention, or ignore you entirely.
- It might begin to raise its lips, show you its teeth, or growl at you.
- It might be more headstrong or defiant, demonstrating less willingness to obey commands or respect your boundaries.
- Some animals may greet you at the gate with stiff body language (head up, hackles raised, tail up, and direct, intense eye contact).
- Some animals may have a heightened prey drive.
- The animal may become more possessive and might "guard" high-value resources such as bones, a favorite toy, their companion, or they might not allow you into the enclosure at all. Additionally, some animals may guard you from their companions, or attempt to keep you from leaving their enclosure.
- Some animals might become more same-sex aggressive.
- Some may become more affectionate or clingy with one person, yet behave in the opposite manner to another.

Some of the more dangerous displays may include:

- Intense snarling and growling, especially with hackles up, and even directly lunging, charging, or standing up on the fence.
- Extremely sudden changes in behavior, such as an animal that goes from standing next to you being petted, to standing with their paws on your shoulders, teeth barred, and growling in your face
- Increased same sex aggression
- A full-blown attack

What can we do in the face of Seasonal Behavioral Changes?

Because there is no knowing whether an animal will demonstrate Seasonal Behavioral Changes until it happens, our motto is to prepare for the worst and hope for the best. At the end of the day, being overly cautious with these animals—especially during this time of the year—will never be a bad thing, as it works in favor of keeping you safe.

It's also important to remain vigilant. Especially in a rescue setting, where some animals respond very differently toward different people, it's import that every member of the team is watching for changes and communicating what they're experiencing.

While spaying and neutering animals isn't guaranteed to stop these changes from happening, the odds are good for animals that are altered before they reach sexual maturity.

For animals that are known to demonstrate Seasonal Behavioral Changes (specifically aggressive changes) avoid going into their enclosures alone, and always have some sort of tool with you to help create space and distance in the event that things go sideways.

With winter on its way, and several new rescues between this winter and last, we aren't quite sure what to expect as far as the season is concerned. But as always, we are so grateful to our Howling Supporters for trusting us to give these animals the best quality of care possible, no matter what the future has in store. More than that, we're so thankful to know that because of you, we have the tools and resources to provide for these amazing animals in a way that is safe for us, and for them. Thank you!

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE MEET OUR 6 NEW RESCUES!



Amazing Coyote Facts

You Might Not Know

WHO IS FASTER?



ROADRUNNER OR COYOTE?

Coyotes are incredible at pest control. You might think coyotes are pests themselves, but in reality they are extremely helpful at keeping voles, groundhogs, rabbits, and mice at bay. Why is this so important? Rabbits prefer to eat lots of fresh green foliage, particularly grass and weeds, and therefore are a top competitor of cows in the fields to get natural food. Groundhogs, voles, and prairie dogs are also a huge complaint from home and land owners because of how much destruction they create due to their digging. Coyotes help keep these problems at a minimum since these animals are their primary food sources!

They have some of the widest range of vocalizations of any mammal in North America. Researchers have identified 11 different vocalizations including a growl, huff, woof, bark, bark-howl, lone howl, group yip-howl, whine, group howl, greeting songs, and yelps. It often sounds as though there are numerous coyotes present when it may just be one or two because of their ability to "throw their voice" into so many different vocalizations one after another.

Eastern coyotes have some wolf (and dog) in their DNA. Have you ever seen and wondered why coyotes in the eastern part of the United States are larger than those in the western states? It's because approximately 100 years ago, coyotes migrated east and hybridization occurred between them and wild wolves. In addition, around 50 years ago, further hybridization occurred with domestic dogs, which introduced even more variety to their genetic makeup and further influenced physical appearance. While DNA testing has confirmed that all eastern coyotes do contain trace amounts of DNA from both dogs and wolves, there is no evidence that these species are still hybridizing to this day. This means that eastern coyotes are still coyotes (not coy-wolves, coy-dogs, or any other "designer breed" name), but there is a portion of their DNA that comes from wolves and dogs, and that is most likely what gives them their larger size.

Coyotes mate for life and raise young together. Once a male and female coyote pair up, they are mates for life regardless of how many other potential suitors may be in the area. Males and females help to raise pups together, which can be anywhere from 1-19. The mating ritual is actually so important for coyote pairs that in captivity, if breeding is not wanted, it is essential that the female remains intact and the male is vasectomized in order to keep the relationship healthy.

Coyotes run faster than roadrunners! If you've ever watched Looney Tunes' Roadrunner and Coyote, you'll always notice the roadrunner is much faster than and outruns the coyote. In real life, coyotes in the west will sometimes pursue a roadrunner for a quick (pun intended) meal. However, roadrunners reach speeds up to 20 mph while coyotes can go upwards of 43 mph. Even wolves don't run much over 37 mph.

They are one of the most adaptable animals in the world. Coyotes are able to create homes and healthy populations in nearly any type of environment, including urban and suburban settings. Coyotes also control their own population size. One of the reasons hunting and "exterminating" coyotes isn't successful is because of the coyotes' ability to produce offspring dependent on the need. If the population is high or there isn't much food available, they may only have one or two pups. However if the population is decreasing, they can have much larger litters of up to 19 offspring.

We hope these facts help people to have a better appreciation for these incredible animals and can see their value within our environmental systems. Approximately 400,000 coyotes are killed each year either from sport or because they are misunderstood and seen as threats or pests. Remember that the best way to keep coyotes away is to keep food items inside and not leave house pets out overnight. We thank you for helping us keep coyotes safe!

fun photos from our
**2021
PUMPKIN
TOSS**

Australian dingo, Glacier, trusts his pumpkin, but maybe not the spectators

Arctic wolf, Flurry, loves his pumpkin

Some of our crew enjoying the day

STIGMA AN ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT LOSS

(Disclaimer: This article contains somewhat graphic information regarding the passing of one of our rescues.)

It is with great sadness that the Wild Spirit Team announces the sudden and unexpected loss of one of our 2020 rescues, Stigma, a 5-year-old mid-content wolfdog who joined the Big Pack in the Sky on September 15, 2021.

Stigma, who was also fondly known as "Bean Blossom," was originally owned by a well-known wolfdog breeder in Indiana along with nearly 20 other animals. Due to personal reasons, her owner elected to move to a state in which wolfdog ownership was illegal. As a result, she was forced to find homes for all of her animals, and Wild Spirit stepped up to take in Stigma and another mid-content female wolfdog named Mika, both of whom were rescued in November of last year.

At the time of her rescue, Stigma was extremely underweight and tested positive for a parasite known as Giardia, which inhibits the infected animal's ability to properly absorb nutrients, water, and electrolytes, often leading to diarrhea and weight loss. Fortunately, we were able to treat Stigma for her Giardia immediately, and follow-up tests showed that she was all clear. Despite the parasite's absence, we knew it would take some time before she reached a healthy weight, so staff continued to monitor her condition from week to week.

Shortly after arriving at Wild Spirit, Stigma was paired with low-content male wolfdog, Kenai, who had been rescued earlier in the year. The two were a magnificent pair of black-phase wolfdogs that loved nothing more than playing through the fence with their neighbors, Lobo and Flicker. Both shy in nature, they preferred the company of one another to that of humans, and didn't often show their affection for each other in our presence. On

rare occasions, however, we were lucky to catch glimpses (and even a few photos) of the two of them napping, flirting, and playing together, especially on cool weather days.

Sadly, as time went on, Stigma's weight did not seem to improve, despite receiving what we call "Booster" meals, produced specifically with weight enhancement in mind. In addition, despite multiple negative fecal and other related exams (included physicals, bloodwork, and screenings for Exocrine Pancreatic Insufficiency and Megaesophagus), her diarrhea did not cease, and we knew that further examinations would be needed. As a result, we decided that during her upcoming spay surgery, we would remove some intestinal tissue samples to be sent for a biopsy in the hopes that it would reveal more about her condition.

On September 15th, Stigma was caught up by our Animal Care Team and was placed under anesthesia for her spay surgery and tissue sample collection. As the procedure was coming to a close, our veterinary partner called myself and our Animal Care Supervisor, Megan, into the room to show us a number of noticeable abnormalities that were found inside Stigma's body. First, he showed us that her uterus, which was removed as part of the surgery, was about three to four times larger than what is considered the average and "normal" size. In addition, he



Stigma (R) on one of her happiest days living here. On New Year's Day, we introduced her to her new companion, Kenai. She was so excited to meet him, and he was a good friend to her.

noticed a number of small unidentifiable granules imbedded inside of her intestines, a few of which were also removed for biopsy. It was during this brief examination—after her spay surgery had already been completed—that Stigma's vitals began to drop unexpectedly, and Megan and I were immediately asked to vacate the room so our vet and his assistant could attempt to recover her. Unfortunately, a few moments later they called us back into the room to let us know that Stigma had passed, and we elected to perform further exploratory surgery in order to attempt to learn what had caused such a rapid decline.

It was during this time that we were able to see and gather further information about what was going on inside Stigma's body, specifically in

the areas that could not be safely examined while she was living. While we were unable to determine the ultimate cause of death, we were able to see that her spleen was covered in lesions, and despite being just 5-years-old, we noticed a number of additional internal abnormalities throughout her body. Due to these findings, we opted to have Stigma's body necropsied in order to determine what was going on with her

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during life and, ideally, learn what it was that caused her death. The results we received following this examination were heartbreaking, and included the following diagnoses (and accompanying explanations from our veterinarian):

Cardiac Dilatation & Cardiomyopathy – “This is a diagnosis often times made too late, just like in Stigma’s case. This type of heart will usually auscultate normally and never present with a murmur. That is because it is a thinning of the walls of the heart, or stretching of the walls of the heart. We would have never been able to diagnose this on physical exam or blood tests. There are lesions we can sometimes pick up on x-rays (though Stigma would have required sedation for these as well, as she was a hands-off animal). She was also suffering from cardiomyopathy, which means she had cardiac disease.”

Pneumonia – Aspiration – “The pathologist mentions pneumonia. The type of pneumonia he mentions is called aspiration pneumonia. This means that ingesta of some sort was aspirated into her lungs. In a normal setting when we administer pre-anesthetic medications, we are able to monitor our patients closely and make sure they don’t regurgitate, because if they do it severely elevates the risk of aspiration pneumonia.”

Inflammatory Bowel Disease – “We were pretty certain she had this going on and were going to confirm this with the tissue samples submitted. The GI tract was completely diseased. There was basically inflammation present throughout the entire thing.”

Conclusion – “With all this said, Stigma had a lot more going on than we were able to identify with our gross physical exams and constant watching on your end. She had full blown unmanaged cardiac disease, which unfortunately is the worse complication we could have had going into surgery. Her already weak heart was depressed even more with the premedication we gave her, then she aspirated. Her anesthetic episode was rough initially; she had increased respiratory rates but we were able to stabilize her in a surgical plane quickly. Her spay was uneventful and the biopsy was performed easily. During this whole procedure we were pushing her body to the limit given the underlying issues we were not aware of.”

The unexpected loss of Stigma has been absolutely devastating to the staff here at Wild Spirit, and to our veterinary partners as well, but in seeing these results we now know that our shy natured girl was suffering for a very long time due to conditions that could never have been detected without putting her under sedation, which was essentially the thing that lost her... At the end of the day, each of us understands that there is always a risk that comes along with medical procedures, especially those that require anesthesia and surgery, but it can become so easy to forget that those risks apply equally to even the youngest and most seemingly “healthy” animals. In Stigma’s case, we

knew she wasn’t completely “healthy” based on the issues we had been seeing for nearly a year, but we never anticipated we might lose her, nor that she could have so many illnesses plaguing her body... While the loss of an animal is never easy, especially when it’s so unexpected, we do find some small amount of peace in knowing that our little “Bean Blossom” is no longer in pain or suffering, and we hope that she has been welcomed with open arms into our Big Pack in the Sky.

Despite being one of our newest rescues, Stigma was Wild Spirit’s second most sponsored animal, so to any of our readers that loved and cared for her just as much as we did, thank you. We hope you can find it in your hearts to not only mourn this loss with us, but to celebrate that we were able to provide Stigma with almost a year of peaceful refuge at the sanctuary—in many ways, thanks to you. And we hope you will consider transferring your Sponsorship to another animal that speaks to you as she did.

On behalf of the entire Wild Spirit Team, rest easy, sweet girl, and be free.



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Upper Mid-Content wolfdog, Katniss, tentatively checking out her first Pumpkin Toss enrichment treat!