

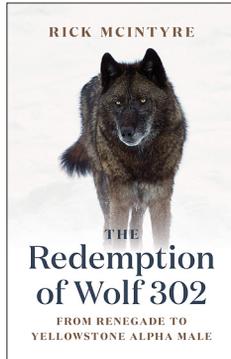
The Redemption of Wolf 302: from Renegade to Yellowstone Alpha Male

By Rick McIntyre. 2021. Greystone Books. 290 pages, 34.95 CAD, 26.95 USD, Cloth.

The Redemption of Wolf 302, the third book in Rick McIntyre's Alpha Wolves of Yellowstone series, picks up where *The Reign of Wolf 21* (2020, Greystone Books) left off (Way 2020). It is another fascinating and epic read by McIntyre that will enthrall fans of nature, wolves and carnivores, wildlife, and national parks, especially Yellowstone. Wildlife biologists, teachers, and other professionals will be inspired by the unprecedented first-hand information provided on a wild species which, I hope, will help readers see wolves as the clever (p. 45), humorous (pp. 46–47), sentient (pp. 170, 237, and throughout book), intelligent (e.g., pp. 173, 226), playful (e.g., pp. 212–213), and ecologically important beings that they are. These attributes contrast with the way they are treated with the long hunting seasons that they experience in the Rocky Mountain states surrounding Yellowstone.

This book transitions smoothly from the second book, with introductory pages that enable the reader to recall what happened in McIntyre's previous volumes, sort of like a two-minute recap before a television series starts a new season. It also allows one to read this edition without reading the previous books in the series. The introduction includes two, two-page maps of the main wolves studied in the park from 2004 to 2009, the timeframe of this tome, as well as where those packs lived. There is also a four-page section, Principal Wolves, which nicely summarizes the positions of the wolves in their respective packs. Lastly, there is a nice three-page summary that describes previous events in Yellowstone, as well as a bit of McIntyre's background to put everything in context for this current book.

The Redemption of Wolf 302 is organized by year into six parts, making it easy to keep track of where you are during the ongoing saga of the park wolves. It can be overwhelming to keep track of the different wolves at times, but McIntyre does a very formidable job of making it manageable to digest without leaving out too many details. In fact, it was like reading about a real-life television soap opera (p. 214). I personally liked the way McIntyre described individual wolves such as 642, 693, 527, 569, Light Gray, Dark Gray, Big Blaze, Medium Gray, Small Blaze, Big Brown, and, of course, 302. These descriptions revealed their unique and distinct personalities.



At the end of *The Reign of Wolf 21*, the world-famous breeding male of the Druid pack, 21 had just passed away in mid-summer 2004 following the loss of his long-time mate, 42, earlier that year. In the beginning of *The Redemption of Wolf 302*, we find 302 and a younger black male nephew of his, 480, trying to join the Druid Peak wolf pack during summer 2004. It took 302 and 480 a few months to integrate into the pack because one of 21's sons (253) claimed the dominant role in the pack until he left at the end of the summer, likely because he was too related to the females in that group (see Chapters 1 and 2). McIntyre provides amazing levels of detail throughout this very easy to read tome. His direct observations of the park's wolves, including of 302's and 480's interaction in the Druid pack, make McIntyre's book series unprecedented. 480, despite his youth, was much more aggressive and took over the alpha male role in the pack. Unlike his nephew, 302 would often run and avoid confrontations with rival wolves (e.g., p. 26). In fact, before the two males were accepted into the pack, 302—to avoid getting attacked himself—once even ganged up on 480 with the Druids and bit him during a fight (pp. 5–6). 480 was a yearling when he became an alpha, yet he held the dominant position in the formidable Druid pack until the end of the book in October 2009. However, the stress of leading a pack wore on 480. He had to constantly deal with the antics of 302 trying to mate females in his pack, as well as in outside packs (p. 163), and the competition for territory with rival wolves, most notably the Slough Creek pack to their west. His black pelage started to turn grey before the age of two, and McIntyre wondered if this anxiety caused him to prematurely age (p. 37)!

We see that Wolf 480 ruled the pack in a benevolent way like Wolves 8 (Way 2019) and 21 (Way 2020) did before him; he didn't kill rival wolves and let them go unharmed during pack interactions (pp. 3–4, 14, 22–23, 143). The only exception was for packs, like the Slough Creeks, that previously killed one of their own (e.g., pp. 144–147, 195–196). His benevolence was a consistent theme throughout the book, even when he fought the rival Mollie's wolves in "The Battle of Mount Norris" (pp. 115–119). During that interaction, 480 defeated the larger pack with just pups of the year helping him. He repeatedly charged at the opposition, knocked them down, then ran after other individuals, ultimately driving off Mollie's wolves.

Wolf 302's behaviour was less predictable. McIntyre watched 302, resting about a mile away near an old Moose carcass during The Battle of Mount

Norris. He was befuddled that an adult male wolf would choose to ignore the calls of an invading pack and spend the day napping (p. 118). In addition to this event, McIntyre also watched as 302 received regurgitations from pups (pp. 112–113) to avoid approaching bull Elk carcasses, which he was clearly scared of. McIntyre deemed him a lost cause and never thought he would be able to lead a pack of his own (p. 118). In the second half of the book, however, 302 started to prove his worth which impressed McIntyre and caused the author to reconsider the “most unorthodox wolf I had ever known” (p. 147). He started to provide for his pack by helping kill Elk, a main food source (pp. 142, 163–164). Then he became an active participant to force the Slough wolf pack out of their Lamar Valley territory (p. 147). Around that time in December 2007, 302 became the most famous wolf in the world when a major television documentary, *In the Valley of Wolves*, premiered (p. 151). That documentary, and successive ones (e.g., p. 152), featured him. Many people, including politicians, came to the park to see 302 (e.g., p. 152). 302 by that point was even chasing out the single males Light Gray and Dark Gray, which were attempting to breed females in the Druid pack (pp. 153–154). It is ironic that this sort of behaviour made 302 famous, given that he did the same thing throughout 21’s reign, causing 21 to chase him out of Druid territory many times (Way 2020). During the 2008 denning season, as throngs of wolf watchers visited the park, 302 could be seen regurgitating food for breeding females (p. 173) and letting them have priority at carcasses (p. 176), stealing Elk calves from Grizzly Bears (p. 177), helping pups cross roads and rivers (pp. 188–189), protecting pups from Grizzly Bears (pp. 192–193), and feeding pups (p. 192).

By late fall 2008, 302 started his own pack, dubbed the Blacktails, with some yearling males from the Druid pack and some females from the nearby Agate pack (p. 201). This area was where 302 was born 8.5 years previously so his story had come full circle. We learn how 302 took care of pregnant females (p. 217) and his pack’s six pups in 2009 (p. 223). He was like a benevolent patriarch (p. 225); despite 302 being the father of some of the pups (p. 212), he took almost a grandfatherly role of babysitting (p. 227) while younger wolves went out hunting. In fall 2009, the Blacktails expanded their range to

find vulnerable prey. They soon encountered a pack to their west and, after all of 302’s adventures with rival wolves in his 9.5 year life, he was fatally injured (p. 237). This was a very sad moment for all who knew him during his long tenure in Yellowstone (p. 241). McIntyre believed that so many people loved 302 because he was relatable—he was an imperfect, flawed individual which turned his life around (p. 242). In fact, fighting the rival pack during his last moments of his life probably saved his sons and daughters; to McIntyre, there was no greater accomplishment than this, placing him in the pantheon of great alpha wolves even if it took him a long time to get there (p. 244).

I continue to be enthralled with Rick McIntyre’s Alpha Wolves of Yellowstone book series which, to date, has covered the first 15 years of wolves in Yellowstone: 1995–2009. The books are riveting and easy to follow. The only complaint I have, which is a very minor one, is that there are sometimes abrupt transitions that bring one paragraph into a totally different scene than a previous one. This seems to occur because McIntyre wants to include important observations from his detailed notes, while also maintaining a chronological organization. I don’t disagree. Once one accepts these seemingly non-sequitur moments (e.g., on p. 174 we go from heart touching moments about a mother wolf interacting with her pup, to an Osprey and Bald Eagle confrontation, to a Grizzly Bear approaching wolves), the book is an absolute joy to read. In the Epilogue (p. 245), we are set up with the fourth installation of the series with the ‘06 Female’, a master hunter (p. 211) and alpha of alpha female wolves. I surmise that next book will pick up in 2009 when this one leaves off. I can’t wait for it!

Literature Cited

- Way, J. 2019. [Book Review] *The Rise of Wolf 8: Witnessing the Triumph of Yellowstone’s Underdog*, by Rick McIntyre. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 133: 180–181. <https://doi.org/10.22621/cfn.v133i2.2407>
- Way, J. 2020. [Book Review] *The Reign of Wolf 21: The Saga of Yellowstone’s Legendary Druid Pack*, by Rick McIntyre. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 134: 392–393. <https://doi.org/10.22621/cfn.v134i4.2739>

JONATHAN (JON) WAY

Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research,
Osterville, MA, USA