

## ZOOLOGY

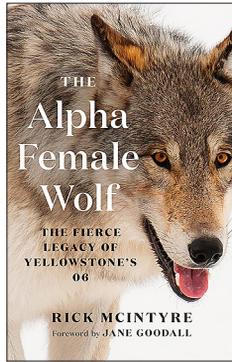
**The Alpha Female Wolf: the Fierce Legacy of Yellowstone's 06**

By Rick McIntyre. 2022. Greystone Books. 280 pages, 34.95 CAD, Hardcover.

*The Alpha Female Wolf*, the fourth book in McIntyre's Alpha Wolves of Yellowstone series, picks up where *The Redemption of Wolf 302* (2021, Greystone Books) left off: in 2009, with an introduction to the 3.5 year old 06 Female, or 06F. This book is another page-turning read by McIntyre that will enthrall many readers, including supporters of nature, wolves, carnivores, wildlife, and national parks—especially Yellowstone. McIntyre provides extraordinarily detailed information on wild Gray Wolves (*Canis lupus*), and I was just as mesmerized reading *The Alpha Female Wolf* as I was with his first three books of the series (Way 2019, 2020, 2021).

McIntyre's documentation of the first 20 years of the wolf reintroduction program in Yellowstone has normalized terms for wolves that typically aren't considered in wildlife management jargon: individual, depression, emotional, friendship, play, anguish, joy, and happiness. Through years of observation, McIntyre has learned that wolves are social, sentient, intelligent animals that have a wide range of emotions just like people do. Despite the hardships wolves face in the wild, he shows how wolves live for their families and care deeply about each other, often playing to show affection (e.g., pp. 51, 55, 79, 203). This is in direct opposition to the way they are currently treated by the Rocky Mountain states surrounding Yellowstone that have long hunting seasons with minimal regulations on killing these ecologically important creatures.

According to McIntyre, female wolves are the undisputed leaders of wolf packs, despite conventional (but misinformed) wisdom that males are in charge (pp. xxiv, xxvii, 21, 28–29, 46, 211, 229). This book is refreshing and different, because the author's first three books all focussed on alpha males. This story centres on 06F, who was named for her birth year (pp. xxvii, 18). She was the fourth of seven generations of Yellowstone wolves that McIntyre and his colleagues followed from 1995 to 2015 (pp. xxvii, 230). She was a very independent wolf that didn't pair off with a male until she was ~4 years old, which in wolf years would be considered middle-aged. When she decided to get hitched, she chose two much younger brothers,



754M and 755M, both teenagers in human years (p. 24). 755M became the alpha male and bred with 06, despite 754M's larger size. 754M became a huge asset to the pack as he most often played with and took care of the pups, which were his nieces and nephews (e.g., pp. 64, 79, 83–84, 147–148). The group became known as the Lamar Canyon Pack, named for where the trio was first observed together. They turned out to be a very successful social unit, raising 100% ( $n = 13$ ) of their pups to adulthood in the three years that 06 had litters (2010–2012).

McIntyre's descriptions are palpable, like you are there in Yellowstone Park with him (a place I have been to many times and have such a fond affection for). The book documents the lives of individual wolves in vivid detail as they hunt for prey—mainly Elk and bison—contend with competitors like Grizzly Bears, and interact with rival wolves. One wolf and one pack in particular—alpha female 686F from the Mollie's Pack—was a real threat to 06's family. 686F was quick to use violence, and her pack killed at least nine other wolves during her tenure (pp. 94, 100, 103, 111, 115, 119, 143, 182). McIntyre often compares 686F to the violent Druid Peak Pack wolf 40F (pp. 94, 115, 209), a major character in his first two books (Way 2019, 2020). Both females ruled their packs with an iron fist and many wolves died as a result. Violent 686F never had any known surviving pups during her tumultuous reign (p. 181).

Despite the danger from rival wolves, the Lamar Pack evaded fatal confrontations, even when standing up to their rivals in some very tense and dramatic moments (e.g., p. 124). 06 was the opposite of 686F, because her pack was not excessively aggressive to other wolves. This behaviour was more similar to famous alpha males, like 21M, that used cooperation over intimidation (pp. xxix, 100; Way 2020). In fact, the first time 06 was documented killing another wolf was when the Mollie's Pack trespassed in the Lamar Pack's territory (p. 141) after previously invading their den site a few months earlier (pp. 119–123). One could say that 06 was an extremely tolerant wolf until she had to protect the vital interests of her family.

*The Alpha Female Wolf* is arranged into six parts with each section focussed on a calendar year. This organization makes it easy to follow the saga of the park wolves over time, starting in late 2009 and ending in 2015. Given all of the wolves involved in the story, I am continually impressed with how McIntyre makes it manageable to digest the information with-

out leaving out too many details. Further, due to his focus on female wolves in this book, at the end of select chapters McIntyre also returns to his first three books and recounts some of the original famous females, including (in order of appearance in the book): wolves 571F, 9F, 5F, 7F, 217F, 472F, Canyon White Female, 926F, 870F, and 42F. While much of the information is repetitive if you have read the previous books, these passages make *The Alpha Female Wolf* viable as a standalone text.

In later chapters, McIntyre writes about the deaths of 754M and 06 and the grieving that the Lamar Pack (pp. 159, 163) and the humans who watched them (especially McIntyre; pp. 160–161) had to deal with following the loss of these legendary wolves. I had difficulty reading this emotional section, even though I knew it was coming. After 06's passing, 755M had to leave the family he helped establish—he was the father to the rest of the females in the Lamar Pack, and wolves usually don't breed with relatives (pp. 168–169). The concluding chapters show him finding, then losing, other mates until he finally settles in the centre of the park, about 25 miles (40.2 km) from the Lamar Pack's territory, with a white female (pp. 202, 206, 217). These later chapters also describe one of 06's daughters, 926F, taking over as the alpha female of the Lamar Canyon Pack. She restarted the group with multiple males, including the four that killed her previous mate and the father of her 2015 litter. Even though she was a relatively small 37 kg, she dominated the four larger males that joined her pack (p. 229), similar to how her mother, 06, controlled 754M and 755M. That was more proof to McIntyre that females are the ones who really run a wolf pack, especially during the pup-rearing period (p. 229).

McIntyre provides unprecedented levels of detail on wolves throughout this easy-to-read tome on pack dynamics and interactions among individuals. I am amazed with the in-depth understanding that he and his colleagues have on the Yellowstone wolves. But

this shouldn't be too much of a surprise, because McIntyre went out every day for over 15 years from 2000 to 2015. I just note some of his experiences here, so reading the full account in this book is a must.

I am continually captivated with McIntyre's Alpha Wolves of Yellowstone series. The first four volumes have now collectively detailed the first 20 years of wolf reintroduction in Yellowstone. Between 1995 and 1997, 41 wolves from Canada and Montana were transported to the area to repopulate the park; the species had been eradicated in the park in the last century due to extermination programs. I already anticipate the release of his fifth instalment in the series, which will likely pick up with 926F's gang and all of the other wolves living in the park in 2015. McIntyre's books are fascinating, because he expands upon his comprehensive field notes to offer insights and perspectives into the amazing wolf behaviours that he has been fortunate to witness over his illustrious career. These books are truly one of a kind and will likely never be replicated again for depth of investigating a particular species in the wild. For the sake of fans of nature and wolves, I hope McIntyre keeps pumping out these books. They are truly a treasure!

#### Literature Cited

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