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Guidelines for Keeping Wolves and Wolf-Dog Hybrids

In our concern for the safety of people and for the proper care of the animals, we make the following points below:

1. Wolves and high-content wolf hybrids should never be regarded as pets. If kept in captivity, whether in zoos, wildlife parks, or by private persons, they should be maintained so as to meet certain minimum standards in keeping with their psychological and physical well-being.

- The wolves should be hand-raised from before the age of 14 days (no later than 21 days), to insure that they are properly socialized to people. The pups need to be isolated from adult canines except for brief visits (less than a few hours per week) for the first four months of life to properly bond with humans. They do, however, need some contact with other canines, or should be raised together in pairs or as a litter to prevent them from fully imprinting on people. If this is not done, they will be flighty and hard to handle, especially for medical treatment, for the rest of their lives. This will result in considerable behavioral stress for the animals even during routine medical care.
- There should be at least two animals raised together. Being highly social animals, they need companions of their own species. Wolves and hybrids raised in isolation from their own kind often display a variety of behavioral problems and abnormalities.
- They should be housed in large enclosure which is made from 8 ft. or higher 11 guage chain link + overhang and skirting with a minimum of 1600 sq. ft. of floor space. The animals should be fed a proper meat diet, including bones, skin, and/or fur. (For details, see Klinghammer and Goodmann, "Socialization and Management of Wolves in Captivity" in Frank, Ed (1987) Man and Wolf. Dr. W. Junk Publishers, Dordrecht, The Netherlands.)
- The human caretakers should make a commitment to the animals for the entire life span of the animals. There should be more than one experienced person who is accepted by the animals involved in caring for them. Adequate provisions for proper psychological and physical care in case of the owner's or owners' death should be made.
- The attending veterinarian should be familiar with the proper handling of wolves. If a veterinarian does not have this experience, reference should be made to Albert, Goodmann, and Klinghammer, "Health Care of Wolves in Captivity" in Frank, H. Ed. (1987) Man and Wolf.

- Prospective owners of wolves or hybrids in captivity should first obtain any necessary permits. They should also try to obtain some verification from qualified persons that the animals were, in fact, properly represented and not just mixed-breed dogs.
- The prospective owners should review the pertinent literature on the behavior and ecology of wolves and speak to as many wolf owners as possible. They should also read as much factual information as possible, such as the "Wolf Management Chapter" by Klinghammer and Goodmann (1985), and obtain subscriptions to one of the wolf hybrid publications such as those published by the lowolfers Association. They should also try to gain hands-on experience with pure wolves and, better yet, attend one of the Wolf Behavior Seminars offered three times a year by the Institute of Ethology at Wolf Park, before they acquire the animals.

2. Adequate facilities, which are expensive, should be ready when the animals arrive. Neighbors should be consulted *prior* to the acquisition of the animals. Wolves should NEVER be kept in a city, town, or housing development. THEY SHOULD NEVER BE KEPT ON A CHAIN IN A YARD OR BEHIND AN ELECTRONIC FENCE AS THE SOLE MEANS OF CONTAINMENT. Children below the age or size of a typical 14 year old, including the owner's, are always potentially in danger. There should be a perimeter fence, tall enough to prevent contact by people, especially children who might get bitten through the fence.

3. Wolf-dog hybrids should, for safety reasons, essentially be kept like wolves as outlined above. While low percentage wolf-dog hybrids may be unlike pure wolves in many respects, and many can and are kept like pure dogs, they all retain, *as do many dogs*, the motivation for predatory behavior. This means that a person, especially a child who tripped and fell, or who is moaning, crying, or screaming, may be considered wounded prey and attacked. Grave injuries, even death, are all too frequent in such cases.

Socialized wolves or wolf-dog hybrids may also challenge the owner or others for dominance. This, too, can result in serious injury to the persons involved. Tame wolves or wolf-dog hybrids may also defend their food against people, especially children. A mere defensive bite can result in serious injuries, even though the animal "meant" no harm.

Of important consideration for those instances where pet wolves or wolf-dog hybrids do bite a person:

- Unlike most cases involving dogs, wolves and hybrids are almost invariably killed immediately for rabies testing.



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- Although there is substantial circumstantial evidence for the effectiveness of rabies vaccines on wolves and their hybrids, there is no legally accepted vaccine for wolves.
- The excessive media coverage which follows bites by pet wolves and hybrids only gives wolves a bad reputation. When a pet dog injures or kills a child, bad publicity stops at the breed involved, but when a wolf-dog hybrid does the same thing, the image of an entire endangered species suffers.
- The proper conditions for maintaining wolves or wolf-dog hybrids safely in captivity are often not met. With respect to the psychological well-being of wolves, even many zoos do not meet optimal conditions for proper handling and care.

The opinions expressed here are designed to:

- protect human life and health and,
- maintain the animals in good psychological and physical condition.

4. Finally, animals kept in captivity should be considered as ambassadors of their species, and the owners should educate the public about wolves -- especially their plight in the wild. It is easy to see that to maintain wolves in captivity requires exceptional dedication, financial resources, proper education and training.