



Intern and interagency personnel processing a wolf (Winter, 2018).

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MEXICAN WOLF TRIBAL YOUTH CONSERVATION PROGRAM White Mountain Apache Tribe

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*The Mexican gray wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*), commonly referred to as “El lobo”, is the most endangered subspecies of wolf in the world.*

There once were approximately 4,000 wolves in their historic range, which included central and northern Mexico and the southwestern United States. In May 1976, the species was listed on the Endangered Species List by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). By the early 1980s, they were considered extinct in the wild with just a handful existing in zoos. Their demise, which began in the early 1900s, was the result of anti-predator campaigns in the U.S. and Mexico. The last 7 survivors in the wild were captured between 1977 and 1980, and bred in captivity.

In 1998 USFWS released 11 Mexican gray wolves (offspring of the original 7 survivors) back into the wild in Arizona as part of the newly established Mexican Gray Wolf Recovery Program (a multi-agency collaboration between USFWS, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the White Mountain Apache Tribe,

the USDA Forest Service, and the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service - Wildlife Services, as well as private organizations). Their numbers have grown slowly, and as of 2017, 113 Mexican gray wolves were living in the wild in Arizona and New Mexico (Source: U. S. Fish And Wildlife Service)

THE MEXICAN WOLF TRIBAL YOUTH CONSERVATION PROGRAM

A small portion of the Mexican gray wolf population utilizes the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) Reservation. The WMAT Game and Fish Department, Mexican Wolf Program (Program), is responsible for monitoring and managing wolves on Tribal land.

For three years (2015, 2016, 2018), thus far, our Program hosted Mexican Wolf Tribal Youth Conservation Internships for White Mountain Apache Tribal Members. Our program was funded by a grant from Bureau of Indian Affairs and generous contributions from Defenders of Wildlife and Native American Fish and Wildlife Society. Through this exceptional opportunity, Tribal youth experienced success

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MEXICAN WOLF TRIBAL YOUTH CONSERVATION PROGRAM



LEFT TOP: Intern setting trail camera (Summer, 2016); **LEFT BOTTOM:** Intern conducting radio telemetry (Summer, 2016); **RIGHT:** Intern handling wolf pup (Summer, 2018).

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in learning and practicing work essential to recovering the endangered Mexican wolf. Youth trained and executed monitoring and management goals with WMAT professionals: Wolf Technicians and the Wolf Biologist/Interagency Field Team Leader. Interns gained exposure, skills, and appreciation for the natural world and natural resource careers. Many youth expressed interest in a natural resource career, upon entering their internship, and left with a greater sense of day to day operations within such careers. They gained a sense of camaraderie and importance of stewarding nature. Some left their internship aspiring to obtain employment in similar fields and/or seeking college degrees in the natural sciences. This program had immeasurable positive impacts on Tribal youth, affecting their individual futures and the future of their communities and lands.

Interns were trained and supervised by WMAT Wolf Technicians and WMAT Wolf Biologist. Interns participated in an orientation – exposing them to Mexican wolf history, recovery, and field skills. They participated in community education and outreach, as opportunity arose (i.e., Tribal schools, science camp, community meetings, and field

contacts). Field activities included: ground telemetry, triangulating wolves and obtaining visuals, utilizing GPS and compass for various activities, deploying and checking trail cameras, setting up food caches, setting and checking trap lines, collecting and entering data, using mapping programs, and keeping a daily journal of their experiences.

The WMAT Mexican Wolf Tribal Youth Conservation Program ran for 8-10 weeks in the summer and offers internships, on a case-by-case basis during other seasons.

Interns were provided with - stipend, boots, backpacks, water bottles, hats, gloves, shirts, note books, pens and pencils, lunch pails and ice packs. Daily lunches were provided by Arrowhead Café – a WMAT community/youth development initiative.

In the summer of 2016, two interns presented on their internship at the Southwest Region Native American Fish and Wildlife Society Conference, at Twin Arrows Conference Center and Casino, on the Navajo Reservation. Additional training that summer included: one day helicopter count and capture operation training, First Aid/CPR course, and Chemical Immobilization of Wildlife course.

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MEXICAN WOLF TRIBAL YOUTH CONSERVATION PROGRAM



© Photograph provided by WMAT Mexican Wolf Program Photo Achieves Interns, Wolf Technician, and Wolf Biologist presenting at a Tribal school (Summer, 2018).

During the winter/spring 2018, we hosted two interns. They participated in opportunities unique to that season's project objectives. During this time, we conducted our annual aerial wolf count and capture operations and den season field work. Interns worked with interagency colleagues executing wolf handling, processing (including collecting biological samples), radio collaring, and releasing wolves. They continued to hone their wolf monitoring and management skills. In preparation for den season, they monitored wolves, assisted with map creation and den visits (with the purpose to obtain early pup counts). They also assisted with livestock depredation investigations and reports. They completed and submitted personal field journal entries and reports.

In the summer of 2018, four interns presented on their internship at the Southwest Region Native American Fish and Wildlife Society Conference, at Sky Ute Casino Resort, on the Southern Ute Reservation in Ignacio, Colorado. Additional training included: one day helicopter count and capture operation training, First Aid/CPR course, and captive wolf capture/handling/processing at Ladder Ranch in New Mexico.

To celebrate our interns and acknowledge all those supporting our intern program, we held an end of season picnic for the interns, their families, contributors, and WMAT Tribal Wolf Program personnel. At this picnic, personnel and interns spoke – providing families and each other a greater understanding of the WMAT Mexican Wolf Tribal Youth Conservation Program.

This program was a great success! We are very thankful for the generous funding provided for our Mexican Wolf Tribal Youth Conservation Program. The WMAT Mexican Wolf Program strongly desires to continue this program in the future and is contingent on funding.

For more information: <https://www.wmatoutdoor.org/>



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MORE ABOUT MEXICAN GRAY WOLVES

Mexican gray wolves are about the size of a German shepherd. They are the smallest subspecies of the gray wolf in North America, weighing in at 50 to 85 lbs. (they are about half the size of their cousin, the North American gray wolf).

Prefer mountain forests, grasslands and scrublands.

Lifespan is 6 to 8 years in the wild; up to 15 years in captivity.

Have a keen sense of smell, excellent hearing and highly sensitive vision. They are intelligent, family-oriented animals who live in family packs and maintain home ranges or territories. They communicate through howling, body language and scent marking.

Kill and eat a variety of prey, including elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, and javelina. Opportunistic, they will scavenge dead elk and deer, cattle carcasses and hunter gut piles during hunting season. They occasionally also prey on livestock; and wildlife biologists believe this behavior could be exacerbated by scavenging on livestock carcasses.

Mexican gray wolf packs are generally fairly small, consisting of an adult alpha pair, a yearling or two, and pups of the year. Social cohesion in the pack is strong. Adults are very tolerant of the growing pups, feeding them meat brought back from kills. Pups establish a dominance hierarchy and learn hunting behavior through play.

Pups are born blind and defenseless. About 8 to 10 weeks after birth, pups are moved from the den site to a rendezvous site, where they remain while the adults hunt. A pack member often stays behind to "babysit" the pups. Pups are mature at about 10 months of age.

Reproduction: Mating season is mid-February to mid-March; Gestation is 63 days; Litter size is 4 - 7 pups.

Did You Know? Mexican gray wolves are not necessarily gray. Their fur is a mix of gray, rust, black and cream.

RESOURCES:

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/>

[http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/species/mammals/](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/species/mammals/Mexican_gray_wolf/)

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