



Wolves have gained an incredibly bad reputation through the ages, through no fault of their own. Myths and fables have always portrayed wolves as savage and cunning killers, waiting to pounce on unsuspecting humans. To the contrary, wolves are afraid of humans and there has never been a recorded attack of humans by wolves in North America. This timber wolf, Trinkka (above), belongs to Fred Keating of Bartlett, a local owner and breeder of hybrid wolves.

(George J. Marcelonis/Mountain Ear Photo)

## Wolf Fact And Fantasy Myths Of The Big, Bad Wolf

The wolf is at the door. Never cry wolf. A wolf in sheep's clothing. Who's afraid of the big, bad wolf? These and other similar phrases have worked their way into our culture over the course of time. Wolves throughout history have attained an almost mythical status, having had feats of unparalleled ferocity and uncanny intelligence attributed to them.

tion that has resulted in the wolf's virtual eradication in the lower 48 states. "From what I can figure out, it goes back to prehistoric times. When man banded together to hunt, he followed the wolves' style and tactics of cooperation. Since wolves were often hunting the same prey, men considered them competitors and began killing them," Keating explained.

*"They were the original monsters. First wolves, then werewolves that tear people apart. It's just not true. They are an incredibly special animal."*

—Fred Keating

The reputation of wolves has grown out of proportion to their actual behavior, to the point where the sound of a wolf howling in the night causes in humans an almost instinctive fearful reaction.

Fred Keating of Bartlett has been studying the habits and history of wolves for more than 10 years. For the past six years he has been raising Loki, a 120-pound northern gray wolf that is technically a hybrid, being 31 parts wolf and one part Siberian husky. But for all practical purposes, wolves in the wild will sometimes breed with wild dogs, so Loki is about as much a wolf as anything found in the wild.

Two-and-a-half years ago, Keating acquired 85-pound Trinkka, who is 7/8ths timber wolf. Together, the pair of wolves has become Keating's pride and joy, and the breeding stock by which he has introduced other wolf cubs to carefully selected individuals in the Valley.

Keating laments the unfair reputation that has followed the wolf. It is a reputa-

As he sees it, little has changed. "Wolves are still considered competitors. Farmers and cattlemen across the country want to eliminate predators like the wolf, mountain lions, foxes, coyotes and bears. Over the years in North America, we've imbalanced the balance of nature," he said.

Keating's love for this animal and understanding of its plight comes after years of study. "I did 10 years of research before I considered owning one. As a breed, you have to feel sorry for them. They're underdogs, always being put down. What they really have is a public relations problem. Bad press," he noted.

Historical and contemporary references to the wolf seem to uphold Keating's theory. In literature of the Middle Ages, the devil often took the form of a wolf. In the years of WWII, Hitler's submarine fleet was dubbed the "Wolf Pack," and his private mountaintop retreat the "Wolf's Lair." And, of course, no

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# Wolves

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American child grows up without hearing of Little Red Riding Hood's encounter with the savage wolf. The woodsman in this story becomes a hero by killing the wolf.

Random hunting and a systematic annihilation of the wolf population in the United States has resulted in its becoming a protected species. According to Keating, Canada and Alaska still offer bounties on wolves, and airborne hunters shoot them by the dozens.

The myth of large wolf packs roaming the woods and picking off unsuspecting humans is just that—a myth. For all of their supposed savagery, not one single attack of a human by a wolf has been recorded in North America, Keating noted.

The ironic part of this fallacy is that wolves are actually afraid of humans, and they will go out of their way to steer clear of areas where humans are scented. Even Keating's wolves, who have been raised by human hand, still recoil in fright from initial contact with a stranger.

Through remarkable adaptability, wolves once roamed from Mexico to Greenland in North America, and throughout most of the rest of the world, as well. Now, few remain in the states, but because of an experiment begun in the 1960s, a wild population has been reintroduced in Minnesota.

When one takes the time to separate fact from fantasy, the wolf is revealed as a social animal, with well-established and structured living groups and family loyalties. "Usually in each pack there is an alpha male and female [at the top of the social hierarchy], and they are the only ones to breed," Keating explained. "When they pair off, it is usually for life."

Keating obviously loves Loki and Trinka, but respects them as well. "They're not domesticated and never will be. That doesn't mean they're dangerous,



(George J. Marcelonis/Mountain Ear Photo)

Fred Keating of Bartlett (upper right), poses with Loki, his 120-pound northern gray wolf (upper left). Keating has owned Loki for six years, and has been breeding him to his timber wolf, Trinka. Keating is anxious to dispell the misconception that wolves are savages. He points out that they are very social, intelligent animals that have been victimized by a bad image.

they're just not dogs. You have to maintain the alpha position in their minds at all times. I'm the leader of the pack, but I'm also a human. I get tested once in awhile, but not in the same way they would test a fellow wolf. As a human, I get an extra measure of respect. It's like having a teenager around all the time—they test you, but they will listen to you," Keating observed.

As further testament to their good nature, Keating displays pictures of Loki and Trinka playing with children and tells of their innate friendliness. "They love children and they love women, but they're afraid of men. It's been conditioned into them over the course of many generations that man is the hunter and the threat," he said.

Keating's relationship with the wolves

quickly dispells the man-eater myth. He is quick to remind the observer of the wolves' intelligence and loyalty, and laughs at the suggestion that wolves howl at the full moon. "Before I got Trinka, Loki was lonely and would howl. But a wolf will howl at anything. The full moon, a half moon, trees, leaves, anything. It's a form of communication and is a language as varied as ours. I have a record of wolf howls I play for them a lot. It's very beautiful," he said.

When one is in a pen with two full-grown wolves, it is easy to imagine the primitive fear these powerful beasts can elicit. Their silver, white and black coats bristle with power and purpose as they circle the visitor. Any residual fear dissolves as Trinka gently takes a visitor's hand in her mouth, a wolf form of greeting, and stands up with forepaws on his chest to sneak a kiss. Suddenly, it's easy to forget these are wild wolves when it's clear that they are more afraid of the visitor than the visitor is of them. Of course, it's not a place one would want to explore without Keating on hand.

"It's something I've always wanted to do. Having done it, it's like being a member of a society that very few peo-

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Local innkeeper and farmer, Johnny Edge Jr., poses with Feron, the new addition to the Rockhouse Mountain Farm. The wolf cub was born to Fred Keating's wolves, Loki and Trinkka, this past September, and has become adapted to life on the farm. The farm's geese, ducks, horses and cows have become part of the cub's family.

## Wolves

Continued from Page 6

ple have the opportunity to join. At first I thought it would be like having a dog, but it's different. Their intelligence level is higher. You can communicate with them. They don't 'belong' to you. You don't own a wolf. They stay with you because they want to. There's a bonding and a love there. They've gone away and come back. They can survive on their own; they don't need me," he explained.

The growing fascination and acceptance of wolves as less than menacing is evidenced by the fact that Keating has had no trouble selling the cubs that Loki and Trinkka have produced. They sell for \$500 each, which is a bargain in comparison with prices elsewhere in the country, which can reach as high as \$2000.

But it takes more than the desire to own a wolf to buy one of Keating's cubs. He is very careful about the homes to which he sends them. "I need to make sure people realize they are getting a wolf, not a dog, and that there are special considerations in care, feeding and understanding that must be realized. Rather than integrating the wolf into your lifestyle, you must integrate into the wolf's lifestyle," he observed.

Johnny Edge, owner of the Rockhouse Mountain Farm in Eaton, is one of the chosen few who has received a Keating wolf. Born Sept. 8, his cub, Feron, has quickly become one of the family. "I was worried at first with all the animals we have here on the farm about even getting a dog, let alone a wolf. We've had German shepherds here, but Feron is different. She has more a mind of her own than domestic dogs, and seems more intelligent. She's very sensitive to scolding and knows when she's done wrong," Edge noted.

While Feron is a pet, Edge also hopes that her territorial instincts will serve the farm well, and keep predators away from his geese, ducks, and other animals. Because the wolf cub was brought to the farm at such a young age, it is acclimating to all the animals on the farm and considers them part of her "pack."

Knowledge and understanding of wolves is the only way to undo some of the bad reputation with which the wolf has suffered since almost the beginning of time, Keating notes. Through his respect and love for wolves, Keating hopes to enlighten as many as possible to their true nature. "They were the original monsters. First wolves, then werewolves that tear people apart. It's just not true. They are an incredibly special animal," Keating reflected "and the link and bond between man and beast can be tapped into and enjoyed if humans only would have the patience and inclination."

—Steven Caming

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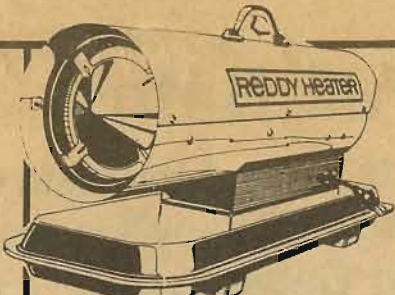


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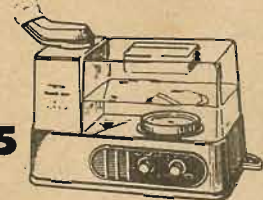
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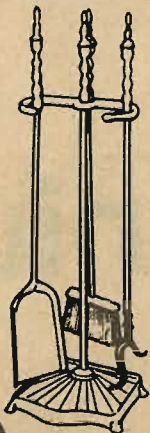
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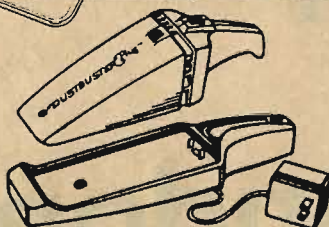
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## Ullr is victorious over Odin

The annual duel between the god of winter, Ullr, and his foe, Odin, the god of summer, took place at Attitash Mountain in Bartlett on Saturday, Nov. 28. Sponsored by the Brettl-Hupfer Ski Club, the duel pits the two gods against one another to see if the ski season will be a fruitful one. Fortunately, the god of winter prevailed (above) and was carried away by his followers. For more photos, turn to Page 25. (George J. Marcelonis/Mountain Ear Photo)