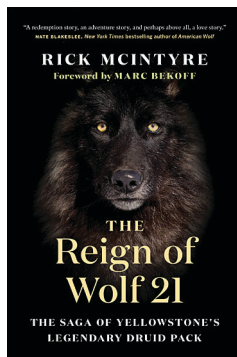


The Reign of Wolf 21: The Saga of Yellowstone's Legendary Druid Pack

By Rick McIntyre. 2020. Greystone Books. 272 pages, 34.95 CAN, 26.95 USD, Cloth.

I was ecstatic to have the opportunity to read *The Reign of Wolf 21* after having reviewed McIntyre's first book in the Alpha Wolves of Yellowstone series, *The Rise of Wolf 8*, last year (Way 2019). In that book, Wolf 21 played a prominent role alongside his step-father, Wolf 8. McIntyre described 21 as being loyal and faithful to 8, as well as being a provider and protector of the pups in the pack. When 21 left his natal Rose Creek pack in fall 1997 at 2.5 years of age, he soon became the dominant male of the adjacent Druid Peak pack. There, 21 reigned not by an iron fist but rather by a caring touch, treating all pack members with dignity and respect, and having a unique, very playful personality which was especially unique for an alpha male. In fact, play behaviour was documented throughout the first book (Way 2019) as well as this one (e.g., pp. 12, 46–47, 125). 21 was never known to have killed rival wolves, always letting them go after only pinning and biting them, including a non-fatal confrontation with his step-father, Wolf 8 (pp. 158, 184). He was recognized as having empathy for other wolves by helping pack members when they were injured or weak (pp. 84, 90).

The Reign of Wolf 21 picks up in the year 2000, where the last book left off. There is some necessary repeated information between the two books so Volume 2 can function as a stand-alone version. It follows the saga of the Yellowstone wolves for five years, through the year 2004 until 21's ultimate demise in June–July of that year. Wolf 21 and his long-time mate, 42, are at the core of this story. The incredible detail in the book on individual pack dynamics and interactions can be summed up in a way that I never expected I would ever write about a wildlife species: a love story. The bond that those two wolves had literally transformed the northeastern part of Yellowstone for generations. The affection ascribed to the couple was repeatedly documented in intimate detail throughout the book (e.g., pp. 10, 46, 125, 203). However, before this love story could fully blossom there was a major impediment in their way: 42's domineering sister Wolf 40, the alpha female of the Druid Pack. Following 42's repeated harsh treatment by 40, documented through much of the original book (McIntyre 2019), 42 and two other packmates killed 40 on an early May 2000 night when it appeared that



40 might kill 42's pups for a suspected third year in a row (pp. 16, 21–25). The next morning McIntyre and his associates saw 40 mortally injured on the side of the road in Lamar Valley, and assumed she was hit by a car. 40 died soon after she was found and the biologists discovered dozens of bite-marks, indicating that 40 was killed by other wolves in a rare instance of intra-pack aggression.

After that event, McIntyre documented Wolf 42 and other females in the pack merging all four of the pack's litters to the main den, something that never happened when 40 ruled the pack (pp. 28–30). 42 had a similar compassionate personality to 21's, and McIntyre thought that was why they worked so well as leaders of the pack for over six years, a full two-thirds of their lives and longer than the average age of a wolf in the wild (p. 203). She even allowed other adult female wolves to peacefully live with her, breed, and raise pups in the same territory, something 40 never permitted. During summer 2000, the pack of just seven adults raised an astonishing 20 of 21 pups through their first year (p. 49). McIntyre was mightily impressed by the pack's cooperation (p. 50), with 21 being the workhorse of the pack ensuring that everybody was well fed (p. 37) while 42 led when moving pups from den and rendezvous sites (p. 38) and when the pack travelled (p. 111). We learned of 42's intelligence, foresight, and pattern recognition, all signs of advanced intelligence in a species, when she chose to den near where Elk, their favourite prey, were going to be in the future (p. 68). There were multiple accounts of 42 using sticks to get pups to follow her across rivers and to new areas (pp. 38, 178). This was truly a time of legends, a golden age for wolves in the park (p. 42). The year 2001 was historic—37 Druid Pack wolves were observed together on August 29 at their main rendezvous site, while one pup was away but later joined them (pp. 78–79). Those 37–38 wolves are still believed to be a record known pack size for wolves anywhere (p. 79).

The second half of the book documents the Druid super-pack and its travels, which stretched about 40 km (25 miles) from east to west in the most prey-rich part of the park. Eventually wolves dispersed from the large family and, instead of going far and wide, most subdivided their natal home range, eventually forming five stable packs and up to seven packs in total in the original super-territory (pp. 140, 218). McIntyre does an admirable job of explaining all these packs without getting too bogged down in the details of the individuals involved. Sections in some chapters have slightly abrupt or awkward transitions from one

scene to the next, but that is to be expected because this book is the first of its kind to document wolves from multiple packs in such incredible, personalized detail. A lot was happening at the time and there was no easier way to explain it than McIntyre did.

To help with organizing the timeline of all of the events taking place, the book is divided into five parts, with each major section being a year from 2000 to 2004. Each section of three to six chapters begins with a map of the pack territories for that year as well as genealogies of each pack, including individual members of each social unit, which really helped in laying a foundation and providing visual organization. McIntyre's books are written in such remarkable detail that the reader can easily get caught up in graphic descriptions of the many individual wild wolves and their families. The level of canine insight that we were privy to witness was amazing. It is remarkable to think that one man could know so much about all of those wolves. Fortunately, the 14-page Index allows one to look up any individual wolf and go back to specific passages when needed.

The last third of the book features 21's main nemesis, Wolf 302, who repeatedly entered the Druid Pack's territory to court and mate with many of 21's daughters, ultimately fathering numerous pups that 21 helped raise. 302 was a much different wolf than 21; he would run off from other wolves and not fight to save himself or his companions (e.g., pp. 163, 191) while 21 was the ultimate defender of his domain, having once run into and forced the retreat of eight Nez Perce wolves, which would forever define 21 for McIntyre (p. 83). 302 did show dogged determination, however, and would regularly make an 80-km (50-mile) roundtrip between his natal territory and 21's family to check in on the pups he fathered, often using the park roads for travelling (pp. 164, 176, 186). 21 would constantly chase 302 away, even forcefully pinning him on occasion, yet 302 would always return. This special wolf's attempt to claim the Druid territory at the end of the book (p. 229) foreshadows McIntyre's third book in the Alpha Wolves of Yellowstone series.

The Reign of Wolf 21 concludes with the heart-breaking account of 21 not knowing that his long-time mate, 42, was killed by other wolves, just shy of her ninth birthday (p. 206). We read a couple of tear-jerking chapters of 21 and the Druid Pack looking for but apparently never finding 42's remains. This wore

on 21, who aged quickly, becoming thin and even more grey (p. 226), before ultimately leaving the pack on 11–12 June 2004, ironically on McIntyre's four-year anniversary of being in the park everyday (p. 228; McIntyre extended that streak to over 15 years [Way 2019]). In July 2004, 21's remains were found in a very secluded and sacred part of his pack's territory, almost like he wished to spend his last moments in a favoured area, probably thinking of his long-time love, 42, whom he often cuddled next to and groomed. Having studied canids myself for two decades, it was a treat to read the amazing level of detail of these famous places where 21 and 42 spent time, and I encourage readers to do likewise.

Given that his surname means "son of the land" in Scottish culture, which is tied directly to wolves (p. 203), it is almost like McIntyre was predestined to be in Yellowstone to document the lives of these now world-famous wolves. But it is important to recognize that these wolves are so popular today because of the efforts of people like McIntyre who spent (and continues to spend) so much time studying their nearly every move.

I enthusiastically recommend this book for fans of Yellowstone or wolves, as well as people who enjoy nature, carnivores, and wildlife in general. Animal behaviourists, wildlife biologists, and other professionals should be inspired with the level of detail provided on a wild species which, I hope, will revolutionize our views of wolves. These sentient, intelligent, and ecologically important beings should be treated with much more respect than allowed by the current long hunting seasons that they experience in the Rocky Mountain states surrounding Yellowstone. As I wrote at the end of my review *The Rise of Wolf 8* (Way 2019), I eagerly await the next edition of the Yellowstone wolf saga.

Literature Cited

- McIntyre, R. 2019. *The Rise of Wolf 8: Witnessing the Triumph of Yellowstone's Underdog*. Greystone Books, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
- Way, J. 2019. [Book Review] *The Rise of Wolf 8: Witnessing the Triumph of Yellowstone's Underdog*. Canadian Field-Naturalist 133: 180–181. <https://doi.org/10.22621/cfn.v133i2.2407>

JONATHAN (JON) WAY

Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Osterville,
MA, USA